Securitization of the Canadian Arctic:
A Path Dependant Analysis

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Abstract

This thesis applies the lens of securitization theory to a path dependence model to study changes in Canada's Arctic policies. Recent policies present a puzzle that begins with the Harper government's decision to securitize the Arctic as a hard security issue and their subsequent inclusion of non-traditional security concerns and concludes with a pivot back to hard security later under the Trudeau government. Harper's securitization is argued as an attempt to break a pattern of military inaction in the region by exaggerating an existential threat and proposing a military-led solution. Limited buy-in from key stakeholders like National Defence led to an new environment where the Arctic carries more political capital thanks to securitization, but the military is resigned to a support role in favour of emphasizing human and environmental security concerns in the North. The recent rise of China as a circumpolar actor and hostilities with Russia present a critical juncture where the Trudeau government and National Defence have reverted to a policy that re-emphasizes the need for military action in the region to address hard security concerns.

Cette thèse applique le prisme de la théorie de la titrisation à un modèle de dépendance au chemin pour étudier les changements dans les politiques arctiques du Canada. Les politiques récentes présentent un casse-tête qui commence avec la tentative du gouvernement Harper de sécuriser l'Arctique en tant que question de sécurité dure et son évolution ultérieure vers des préoccupations de sécurité non traditionnelles dans la région et se termine par un retour à la sécurité dure plus tard sous le gouvernement Trudeau. La sécurisation de Harper est considérée comme une tentative de briser un modèle d'inaction en matière d'activité militaire dans la région en exagérant une menace existentielle et en proposant une solution dirigée par l'armée. L'adhésion limitée des principales parties prenantes comme la Défense nationale a conduit à un environnement dans lequel l'Arctique porte davantage de capital politique grâce à la titrisation, mais où l'armée se résigne à un rôle de soutien. La récente montée de la Chine en tant qu'acteur circumpolaire et les hostilités avec la Russie constituent un moment critique où le gouvernement Trudeau et la Défense nationale sont revenus à une politique qui met l'accent sur la nécessité d'une action militaire dans la région pour répondre à de graves problèmes de sécurité.

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Introduction

In the past several decades, the Canadian Arctic evolved from a benign region in geopolitics to a securitized region that is increasingly the subject of academic discourse and media speculation. The central research question of this thesis asks why the Conservative government under Stephen Harper began a campaign to securitize the region in 2006 and why this approach to the Arctic continues under the Justin Trudeau Liberal government. Securitization effectively transitioned the political discourse of the region from that of regular politics to a security matter, justifying a greater than normal amount of attention and political capital. The research question is answered by applying the lens of securitization theory through a path dependence analysis of successive Canadian security and Arctic policy frameworks. It focuses on analyzing changes introduced under Harper in the security context of the mid-2000s and why those changes persist in a new security context under the Trudeau government. Three defining eras are examined with respect to Canada's Arctic policy, the Cold War, post-Cold War, and so-called "new Cold War" eras. This longitudinal approach helps to contextualize government policies according to exogenous external factors to identify patterns in policy formulation.

In 2006 and 2007, Prime Minister Harper carried out a series of speech acts that presented the Arctic as a region under serious threat. Specifically, Harper communicated that there is a threat to Canada's Arctic sovereignty by unspecified external forces. This presents a puzzle as significant security concerns were not expressed in the years leading up to Harper's speech acts. Afterwards, public media proclaimed an impending resource war, "Arctic rush," emerging Polar Silk Road, a new Cold War, regional arms race, and that the Arctic will be the next intersection of great power competition (e.g. (Rosen 2022) (Howard 2009) (Ahmed and Lambert 2021) (Wilhelmsen and Gjerde 2018) (Limas-Villers 2022)). These media claims tend

to rely on speculative arguments and present a misleading picture of Arctic politics, which has historically been far more stable than most popular narratives imply. The literature review of this thesis will temper such bold sweeping claims about the region to demonstrate its stability and present the shortcomings in the literature's ability to sufficiently explain why Canada securitized the Arctic.

I present a new explanation for Canada's decision to securitize the region. Securitization served as an attempt to break a cyclical pattern of military inaction in the far north that was motivated by longstanding insecurities about Arctic sovereignty. The hard security-oriented approach articulated by Harper was a legacy of how the Government of Canada traditionally views Arctic sovereignty as a military matter. The strong rhetoric and subsequent policies from the Harper government significantly expanded the scope of Canada's Arctic and northern policies, which centered around security. This contributes to the Trudeau government's decision to double-down on this security approach in response to growing concerns about China and Russia's geopolitical strategies for the region. With growing foreign interest in the Arctic, Harper and Trudeau's policies present a long-term attempt to develop a proactive approach to circumpolar politics. The context of this research is one where the future of Arctic politics is shrouded with uncertainty. The challenge of this research is to analyse Canada's successive Arctic policies in a dynamic Arctic context and reconcile Canada's actions with competing claims that the region is of vital strategic interest yet is also desolate, politically stable, and economic opportunities are mostly hypothetical.

Literature Review

Few regions have been the subject of so much hype, speculation, and bold proclamations as the Arctic in the twenty-first century (Østhagen 2021, 55). Ideas of "the new great game" in

geopolitics have motivated academics, journalists, and politicians to pay closer attention to the High North (Gabrielson and Sliwa 2014, 114). However, this newfound interest, particularly since Russia's flag planting on the seabed of the North Pole in 2007, often carries narratives of the Arctic as a battleground for great power politics, impending interstate conflict, and a new Cold War. Such narratives provide a logical explanation for Canada to securitize its Arctic territory, but these narratives are often hyperbolic, rooted in speculation, and cannot explain the decision to securitize the region, which took place a year prior in 2006. This literature review uses relevant academic publications over the past two decades to contextualize securitization amidst a dynamic and increasingly popular area of international relations scholarship. In doing so, an important gap is identified where existing literature does not sufficiently answer why the Arctic became a securitized region for Canada or why a security-based approach continued, even after a change in government from the Harper Conservatives to the Trudeau Liberals in 2015.

Existing explanations for Canada's securitization of the Arctic can be broadly placed into two categories: concerns over sovereignty; and domestic political considerations. The most common explanation for the shift in Arctic policy is the government's repeated concerns about Arctic sovereignty. These anxieties have permeated discussions of Canada's Arctic and Northern policies since at least 1945 (Landriault 2011, 59).

To establish sovereignty, a state must have autonomous control over a specified territory, which is recognized by other states in the international community. This presents a grey area in Canada's Arctic Archipelago. Most of the international community, including the United States and members of the European Union, view the Northwest Passage waterway that travels through the Archipelago as an international strait. This contradicts Canada's position on the matter by not recognizing Canada's autonomous right to control the waterway. This is confounded by the lack

of physical authority Canada asserts in the region. Aside from the issue of the NWP, Canada has *de jure* authority over the entire Arctic Archipelago and the exclusive economic zone that extends from it. However, Canada struggles to demonstrate *de facto* authority due to the remoteness of the region. The common approach to establish sovereignty is to have boots on the ground, a sentiment routinely echoed by the Government of Canada. The military is typically treated as the government entity that can best demonstrate sovereignty by displaying their physical presence in a region. However, there are alternative conceptions of sovereignty that include historical precedent, cultural connections, or civilian activity in a region, such as that of the Inuit in the Canadian Arctic.

Sovereignty is such a common theme in Canadian Arctic politics that it acts as an omnipresent referent object in academic discourse (Landriault 2011, 60). It is sometimes referred to as the zombie of Canadian public affairs; a dead issue that refuses to stay dead (Coates, et al. 2008, 13). Andrea Charron and James Fergusson temper these discussions by calling the use of the words *sovereignty* and *Arctic* in the same sentence as "a recipe for alarmist and precipitous action" (Charron and Fergusson 2018, 5). That statement alludes to the fact that the literature does not always present a clear and consistent case for why Canada's Arctic sovereignty is under threat. Instead, sovereignty concerns are often either assumed or are based on limited empirical evidence. Sovereignty concerns that are repeated in the literature stem from three key issues: 1) foreign interest in future economic opportunities; 2) Russia's growing military presence in the region; 3) and the disputed status of the Northwest Passage.

Regarding the first of these issues, the Arctic has garnered significant interest from the international community for its resource deposits, specifically offshore oil reserves and rare-earth elements that are critical in the production of many electronics. This accurately labels the Arctic

as the final frontier of hydrocarbon resources. The Arctic is estimated to have 1/4th of the world's untapped oil reserves, which attracts the keen interest of states, multinational corporations, and circumpolar indigenous groups (Coates, et al. 2008, 14). However, commercial access to these deposits is not expected to develop for many decades (Dadwal 2014, 820). A so-called "resource war" is highly unlikely for two main reasons: the general inhospitality of the region towards commercial enterprise and the region's geopolitical stability.

Much of Arctic, particularly Canada's Arctic Archipelago, has an incredibly inhospitable climate and terrain. Extreme cold, limited sunlight for much of the year, bedrock, permafrost, unpredictable ice patterns, minimal infrastructure, exorbitant transportation costs, a small pool of potential labour, and the remoteness of the deposits are some of the factors that severely limit the commercial viability of extractive resource industries in Canada's Arctic. As far back as the Second World War, military officials cited the two most prominent protectors of Canada's far north as "Generals January and February" (Stacey 1940, 5).

These realities significantly diminish the practical value of the Arctic as the cost of resource extraction generally outweighs current market prices. However, this economic equation may change over the next several decades and into the next century. Growing demand for hydrocarbons, critical minerals, and rare-earth elements combined with the effects of climate change will simultaneously increase market prices and lower the cost of resource extraction in the Arctic, presumably to the extent that some large-scale extractive operations will become financially viable.

However, even when this occurs in the distant future, it should not be expected to cause a resource war for the second reason; the borders are well-defined and territorial disputes between Arctic states are adjudicated within the international legal system. Few border disputes exist in

the Arctic. The stability of region in the face of a hypothetical resource war is underscored by the fact that 89% of territory within the Arctic Circle falls within the established Exclusive Economic Zones (EEZs) of Arctic states (Claes and Moe 2018, 10). Furthermore, most of the proven offshore resource deposits exist entirely within the EEZs of individual states (European Union 2014, 2).

After Canada and Denmark resolved the dispute over Hans Island in 2022 by splitting the island in half, only two noteworthy disputes remain for Canada. One is the long-running dispute with the US over the boundary of the Beaufort Sea, and the other is Russia's continental shelf claim over the Lomonosov Ridge (the North Pole) that overlaps with Canada and Denmark's shelf claims. While this constitutes the two ongoing "major" territorial disputes in the Arctic, neither is considered significant enough to affect interstate relations (Østhagen 2021, 56).

Dadwal (2014, 822) recognizes the significant limitations on resource extraction but suggests that once the cost equation flips there will be cause for concern. She argues that while the Arctic has been exemplary in demonstrating the strength of regional cooperation, nationalistic policies are being adopted by more and more states to address energy concerns. Even governance processes through the Arctic Council may become complicated with energy-hungry observer states demand access to Arctic resources (Dadwal 2014, 822). Arctic governments collectively claim to hold legal and sovereign rights over the territory. However, outside states, namely China, contend that the Arctic should be treated as "common heritage" and that the region and its resources should be available to all members of the international community (Sørensen and Klimenko 2017, 9).

Scholars observe a sustained mutual desire for cooperation between all Arctic states, even in the aftermath of Russia's invasion of Crimea in 2014 (Heininen, et al. 2020, 14). This relates

to the idea of a "pluralistic security community," where a group of actors share a strong common affinity for a particular territory, which motivates them to seek a peaceful resolution to disputes (Deutsch, et al. 1957, 2). This perception of the Arctic emerged near the end of the Cold War when Soviet Secretary General, Mikhail Gorbachev, delivered the famous Murmansk Speech in 1987 in which he shared his vision for the Arctic as a "zone of peace" (Gorbachev 1987).

Dadwal labels literature that is skeptical of a future conflict as a "prevailing optimism" that seeks to maintain the notion of the Arctic as a zone of peace (Dadwal 2014, 822). This is particularly relevant to the High Seas, which is the 11% of Arctic territory not accounted for in the eight EEZs. There are few forms of legislation or governance over the Arctic's non-EEZ territory besides UNCLOS and its sub commission, the CLCS. In addition to oversight by these two regimes, the same set of limitations that prevents large-scale commercial operations in much of the Arctic applies multifold to the High Seas of the Arctic Ocean.

Literature is inconsistent about the prospects for armed conflict in the North American Arctic. Some scholars cite a struggle over territory and resources in the region as a cause for serious concern (Borgerson 2008) (Borgerson 2009) (Huebert 2014). While no scholars proclaim that a violent confrontation is inevitable, it is difficult to dismiss the idea that armed conflict could occur. The primary concerns academics cite are competition over resources and control over strategic waterways. Russia continues to be at the forefront of both matters.

Russia's behaviour in violation of international rules and norms prompted it to be labelled as a "wild card" (Tamnes and Offerdal 2014, 177). Its fragile social and economic structure combined with the invasion of Ukraine makes predictions of Russia's future development and behaviour in the Arctic very difficult. It is therefore intuitive to explain Canada's securitization of the Arctic as a direct response to a perceived Russian threat. However, it does not align with the

timeline of securitization. Harper conducted his first speech act in August of 2006, whereas the resurgence of Russian activity in the region only began in the summer of 2007.

Russia's flag planting on the North Pole in August of 2007 can be seen as a watershed moment in bringing attention to Arctic security, alongside Harper's securitization rhetoric. In that same summer, Russia resumed bomber flights in the region for the first time since the dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991 (Lasserre and Têtu 2017, 305). This prompted worst-case-scenario thinking in public media, which contributed to a surge in Arctic security literature between 2007 and 2010. However, academics and military officials did not express any sort of consensus about Russia's actions being a legitimate security concern (Piskunova 2010, 851). Academic literature was quick to dismiss the significance of Russia's flag planting as merely a stunt, which owes as much to stagecraft as it does to statecraft (Dodds 2010B, 63). Meanwhile, the Harper government used Russia's actions to retroactively justify the need to securitize the region (Byers 2010).

Throughout Vladimir Putin's tenure as Russian president, Moscow engaged in aggressive behaviour, the unlawful use of force, and a blatant disregard for international laws and norms. This culminated in the Ukrainian conflict of 2014 and invasion in 2022. However, Russia's behaviour in the Arctic is different. Russia is generally cooperative with its circumpolar counterparts in accordance with Moscow's focused effort to establish an "Arctic brand" to positions itself as a co-leader in the region (Laruelle 2014, 263).

Many of Russia's activity in the Arctic appear threatening. Since 2014, Russia has made significant investments to revitalize Soviet-era military bases and create new infrastructure along its northern coastline. Many civilian ports and airfields are dual-use facilities capable of staging fighters and bombers that can transit the Arctic Circle (Staalesen 2019).

There is also an ongoing effort to centralize control over economic activity in the region. In December of 2018, Russia gave monopolized control over shipping through the NSR to the state-run corporation, Rosatom, which is also responsible for Russia's nuclear-powered icebreaker fleet. The government doubled-down on direct control over the NSR with the introduction of limits on foreign warships transiting the passage in March of 2019, requiring a 45-day notice prior to voyages (Conley, The Revitalization of the Red Arctic 2021).

Russia has keen interest in demonstrating its control over the region, particularly the NSR. The Vostok-18 exercise in the Bering Strait in 2018 involved more than 300,000 troops and was the largest Russian military exercise since the end of the Cold War (Conley, Melino and Alterman 2020). In the summer of 2019, the military's Ocean Shield Exercise demonstrated Russia's capacity to defend their nuclear bastion in the Kola Peninsula. Other major Arctic naval exercises include the Tsentr-19 and Grom-19 that both took place in fall of 2019.

Despite this, Russian-specific literature consistently categorizes these activity in the region as a part of "legitimate state business" associated with upscaling its energy industry, refitting ports to accommodate growing resource extraction and shipping industries, and supporting Arctic residents (Buchanan 2023, 14). Many academics argue that military activity along the Kola Peninsula is an attempt to demonstrate great power status and the resumption of bomber flights in the Arctic is intended to appeal to a domestic audience (Huebert 2019, 78-79). In this sense, these events can be seen as "purely political symbolism" rather than a threat in the Arctic (Gandhi and Freeman 2007).

Today, it may not be so easy to remain content with Russia's Arctic buildup given their blatant invasion of Ukraine in 2022. Prior to the large-scale invasion, Russia's Arctic military capabilities were widely accepted by the academic community to be defensive in nature, though

still concerning due to power projection capabilities (Regehr 2021). However, recent actions cast a veil of uncertainty on virtually all Russian activity.

It must be noted that the presence of weapons and military capabilities in the Russian Arctic does not necessarily constitute a threat to Canadian Arctic sovereignty. Russian aggression is apparent in many areas of the world, however, there is no significant evidence that Russia has plans to take over Canadian Arctic territory in the manner they are carrying out in Ukraine. The United States sees Russia as an "acute threat" to western interests, in contrast to China whom scholars regard as a revisionist power that may threaten the current world order (Hicks and Grady 2022).

The chronology of Russia's actions in the Arctic do not align with the Harper government's decision to securitize the region. The resurgence of Russia in the Arctic only began in the summer of 2007, with activity ramping up in 2014. Harper's first two securitization speeches occurred in August of 2006. While Russian activity is an important variable in examining Arctic policy under the Justin Trudeau government, it does not factor into the initial decision to present the Artic as a securitized issue that took place early into Harper's tenure.

The third sovereignty-related concern for Canada is the Northwest Passage. The importance of the NWP and other Arctic trade routes in the future of the global economy is unclear. There is a large discrepancy regarding the significance of Arctic waterways between publications in the media and academic literature. Regular coverage of melting sea ice in the Arctic since 2003 has caused the phenomenon to initially be used as a barometer for climate change. Contemporary discussions generally accept that a significant portion of sea ice will melt that will bring forth new opportunities (Christensen 2013, 27). This sparks debate and

speculation about the future viability of oceanic transit through the Arctic, particularly with the Northern Sea Route across Russia and Northwest Passage through Canada's Arctic Archipelago.

The expressed interest in using these waterways by China and other trade-centric economies prompts speculation about a commercial expansion of the waterways. In 2013, The Korean Maritime Institute predicted and 6.5% annual increase in shipping between Asia and Europe through the Northern Sea Route, culminating in as much as one quarter of all cargo traffic between the two continents by 2030 (Koranyi 2013). Export-dependent states across Asia express a keen interest in the Arctic for the potential of these new trade routes. This includes Japan, China, Korea, India, and Singapore who are all observers states in the Arctic Council.

The hyped advent of large-scale commercial shipping activity in Canada's far north developed into progressively more sensational media reporting on the acceleration of sea-ice melt (Bourbonnais and Lasserre 2015, 71). The numerous exaggerated claims were given some credibility in 2006 when Prime Minister Harper suggested the possibility of year-round commercial shipping (Harper 2006A). This contrasts with the Northern Sea Route along Russia's Arctic coast where year-round transit is possible, albeit with assistance from powerful icebreakers (Bourbonnais and Lasserre 2015, 71).

However, Arctic shipping has not lived up to the lofty expectations touted by media outlets and will not see substantial growth for at least several decades. North American Arctic waters are currently dominated by fishing, mining-related transportation, and servicing coastal communities, and this should not be expected to change (Lasserre 2022, 1). In 2013, 283 cargo ships and bulk carriers transited the Arctic. By 2019, that number rose to 361, however, most of that increase came from mining operations and servicing local communities rather that commercial transit through the region (Protection of the Arctic Marine Enviornment 2020, 8).

Melting sea ice improves the prospects for commercial shipping and the expansion of other industries such as fishing and tourism but there are many practical limitations to the widespread use of Arctic shipping routes, especially in the commercial shipping industry. These reasons include the unpredictable patterns of floating sea ice, a common need for icebreakers, incomplete nautical charts, areas as shallow as 6 meters, limited search and rescue capabilities, enormous insurance costs, and inconsistent travel times (Aksenov, et al. 2017, 313).

Even under drastic climate change trajectories, the North American Arctic will not be fully ice-free and Arctic waterways will remain only seasonally viable for the foreseeable future (Dodds 2010A). By 2090, the Arctic Circle is expected to fall to as low as 10% ice coverage between August and September but will still experience 85% ice coverage through the winter months (Rogers, et al. 2013, 238). Ice-free summers within the Canadian Arctic may emerge as early as the 2050s, assuming the current rate of greenhouse gas emissions remains constant (Notz and Stroeve 2018, 414). Though, ice will continue to limit shipping activities in the High North. Advancements in naval technology may assist in the navigation of icy waters (Bourbonnais and Lasserre 2015, 81). However, shipping will be subject to seasonal navigation and remain very sensitive to patterns of ice melt according to a given vessel's ice class (Sibul, et al. 2023, 938).

Speculation about the future of Arctic waterways and potential interest from large trade-centric economies like China is cited as a sovereignty concern for Russia and Canada, though, claims over potential encroachments on state sovereignty are misleading. The legal status of the Northwest Passage is disputed between Canada, who claims it to be internal waters, and much of the international community, who claim the passage constitutes an international strait. No state, however, claims that the passage is not a sovereign part of Canada, the debate is whether foreign vessels have a right to benign passage through the waterway.

Foreign interest in the NWP represents more of a threat to Canada's *de facto* sovereignty over the Arctic Archipelago rather that its *de jure* sovereignty. As a result, some scholars question the extent to which Canada is even facing a sovereignty challenge. The status of the NWP is not formally established. Therefore, *de jure* sovereignty cannot be under threat as there is no precedent of international recognition for the status of the NWP (Charron and Fergusson 2018, 3). This situation resembles other territorial discrepancies in the region, such as the disputed Canada-US EEZ boundary in the Beaufort Sea, which cannot represent a threat to state sovereignty as *de jure* sovereignty is not established. However, this is a very technical interpretation of the sovereignty debate and assumes Canada's perception of their own sovereignty is the same as what is legally established. Canada's *de facto* sovereignty may be considered weak and potentially vulnerable. Charron and Fergusson warn that a loss in *de facto* sovereignty could even happen by stealth is enough territory is sold off to foreign state-based companies (2018, 4).

Apart from sovereignty-related concerns, the other explanation for Canada's securitization of the Arctic stems from a domestic narrative. The literature offers a domestic political explanation that connects the change in Arctic policy to a desire for the Conservatives to present a distinct approach to foreign policy. Essentially, the Conservative government sought to differentiate their foreign policy platform by presenting an alternative to the Axworthian characteristics of their Liberal predecessors (Chapnick 2012, 143).

One of the criticisms of this explanation is that the Harper Conservatives' foreign policy differed from that of the Liberals in rhetoric but continued to follow many of the key themes of the Liberal platform of rebuilding failed states and developing a new policy related to the Arctic (Sloan 2006, 161). Commitments to bilateral defence with the US were made by the

Conservatives yet the renewed NORAD agreement in 2006 was primarily negotiated by the Liberals (Sloan 2006, 161). The Conservative government even carried over many of the unpopular foreign policy decisions made by the previous Liberal governments. For example, Canada's mission in Afghanistan and the development assistance program faced significant public criticism yet were maintained by the new Conservative government.

Kim Richard Nossal provides a modified argument of the domestic political explanation with the idea that the government's strategy was to use international policy in domestic politics to advance a partisan agenda. He argues that Harper's goal was to use foreign policy as a tool to reshape Canadian politics to make the Conservatives "the dominant political party in Canada" (Nossal 2013, 22). Nossal argues that securitization rhetoric attempted to play into a sense of national pride through the proverbial "Arctic card," which taps into Canadians' affinity for being an Arctic nation (Nossal 2007, 28). This process sought to garner more support from the electorate by creating a positive association between national pride and the Progressive Conservative Party.

A limitation of this argument is that it does not address why the military was used as a central tool in Arctic affairs. Securitization introduced a rhetoric of fear that was inconsistent with the language traditionally used in Canadian defence discourse, risked frustrating allies in Washington, and risked provocation from Moscow at a time when Russia was not seen as a significant threat to North American security (Chapnick 2012, 143). The Arctic card adds another dimension of securitization as a political tool but does not fully explain the motivations behind securitization.

Adam Chapnick's work extends beyond the scope of Arctic policy to include Harper's foreign policy more generally. He concludes that the Harper government increased the profile of

Arctic policy issues. However, Harper's deviation from the Axworthy Doctrine of the previous Liberal governments under Jean Chrétien and Paul Martin is just a counter-revolution that will experience its own counter-revolution with the next new government (Chapnick 2012, 154). This introduces a second puzzle to Arctic securitization, which is why the Trudeau Liberals maintained a security-based approach to the region since forming in 2015.

As the "Survey of Arctic-Related Policies" section will demonstrate, Canada's approach to Arctic security from the onset of the Cold War until the Harper government embodies a cyclical pattern of minimalism and reluctant engagement. The act of securitization sought to break this pattern to bring about a more robust and proactive approach to the Arctic, which constitutes an explanation for the first puzzle. Continuity under Trudeau, in contrast to what some academics expected, is the second puzzle, which is explained by developments in the wider Arctic security context, mostly actions from Russia and China that took place after securitization.

Alternative explanations for continuity under the Trudeau government exist at a theoretical level but have yet to be explicitly demonstrated in the literature. Pierson explains that in policy formulation, the historical context of an event is critical to determining path dependency (Pierson 2000, 252). Past events can impact the future through a self-reinforcing mechanism, feedback loop, or lock-in commitment (Pierson 2000, 254) (Mahoney and Schensul 2006, 457). The idea is a policy inertial whereby the cost of deviating from a given policy direction is high and thus avoided, even if an alternative policy approach would be better. Thus, the theories of securitization and path dependence would suggest that the Trudeau government might be maintaining the legacy of Arctic securitization because it is politically more tenable than fully reforming Canada's approach to the Arctic.

In summary, the literature provides two answers to the question of why Canada securitized the Arctic. The most common throughline is sovereignty. Depending on the series of arguments, Canada's sovereignty over the Arctic is threated by either Russia's activity in the region, foreign interest in valuable resource deposits, or foreign interest in the NWP. This constitutes a realist argument that securitization was a response to external threats. As demonstrated earlier, the chronology of actions by Russia and China does not sufficiently explain the initial securitization decision that was made by the Harper government in 2006. A realist argument based on sovereignty concerns would thus suggests that securitization occurred due to a misinterpretation of the Arctic context leading up to the speech acts of 2006 and 2007, violating the assumption of rational actors.

The second explanation the literature proposes is that Harper introduced securitization for domestic political considerations. This claim is refuted by some academics who contest that Harper's foreign policies carried over much of the same substance as previous governments and apart from rhetoric, operated much the same as a counterfactual Liberal government. The domestic political explanation does not explain why securitization was the method to gain political support rather than an alternative Arctic policy or why a counter-revolution did not take place following the change in government in 2015. This constitutes the second puzzle in this research.

This thesis advances the argument that Harper's use of the threat narrative was a political tactic to raise the profile of the Arctic region and create policy change, not a reaction to a genuinely perceived security concern. This differs from Nossal's domestic political considerations argument by asserting that securitization was used as a tool to exaggerate the government's need to act, rather than a tactic to differentiate the Progressive Conservative Party

from rival parties and drum-up support from the electorate as "playing the Arctic card" would suggest. The solution to the second part of the puzzle explains that continued securitization under the Trudeau government is a response to new legitimate concerns from Russia and China.

Methodology

The methodology of this research applies the lens of securitization theory within a path dependence model. This requires a qualitative data set that consists of publications and speeches relating to Arctic security from the Government of Canada. The set of relevant publications is arranged into three different time periods, the Cold War era (1947-1991), the post-Cold War era (1991-2009), and the 'new' Cold War era (2009-present). These categories help to contextualise policy statements according to the overarching paradigm of Arctic policy discourse at the time that they were introduced. This approach facilitates a longitudinal analysis of documents that will help illustrate the pathway towards the securitization of the Arctic through process tracing, as opposed to using a cross-section of Arctic policy from one specific case study. The geopolitical context of the Arctic is shaped by great power politics and regional relationships. Because these relationships are dynamic, the political environment of the Arctic is constantly changing. As a result, the three time periods are not ridged but merely serve as a framework for guiding the discussion of Canada's Arctic policies.

The primary theoretical approach of this research is securitization theory. The theory developed out of the Copenhagen School of Security Studies, which provides a post-structuralist framework to help understand and explain how threats emerge, are identified, and are managed on various levels. The theory was first comprehensively outline in the 1998 book, "Security: A New Framework for Analysis," by Barry Buzan, Old Wæver, and Jaap de Wilde.

Securitization begins when the securitizing actor carries out a *speech act* where a referent object that is commonly understood as a political issue is presented as an existential threat. There is deliberate ambiguity in defining a "threat," which is based on an actor's perceptions rather than an objective reality (Buzan, Wæver and de Wilde 1998, 24) (Bevir and Rhodes 2017, 138). The success of securitization is contingent on the target audience of the speech act accepting that the referent object constitutes a serious impending danger. This process takes politics beyond the established "rules of the game" where an issue is framed as a special kind of politics, or above normal politics (Buzan and Wæver 2009, 275). If securitization is accepted, the government can maintain legitimacy and credibility when introducing what would otherwise be considered an extraordinary and perhaps inappropriate response to a political issue. Securitization essentially acts as a more extreme version of politicization (Buzan, Wæver and de Wilde 1998, 22).

Traditionally, scholars apply securitization theory to trace and explain instances of securitization through discourse analysis in specific case studies (Robinson 2017, 506). With few exceptions, securitization theory neglects process tracing techniques as a method for explaining securitizing behaviour (Robinson 2017, 506). However, a causal logic based on deduction can highlight the factors that surround a critical juncture that inform the decision to securitize (Sandal and Ozturk 2023, 39). These *junctures* are *critical* because they produce a consequential pathway defined by the series of subsequent events (Mahoney 2001, 114). This series of events is considered difficult to deviate from due to institutional reproduction, which stiffens the pathway of events (Capoccia and Kelemen 2007, 341).

The critical juncture framework provides a roadmap for analyzing multifaceted political phenomenon through episodes of political innovation and continuity by focusing on the steps leading up to political changes (Collier and Munck 2017, 8). Contingency is fundamental to the

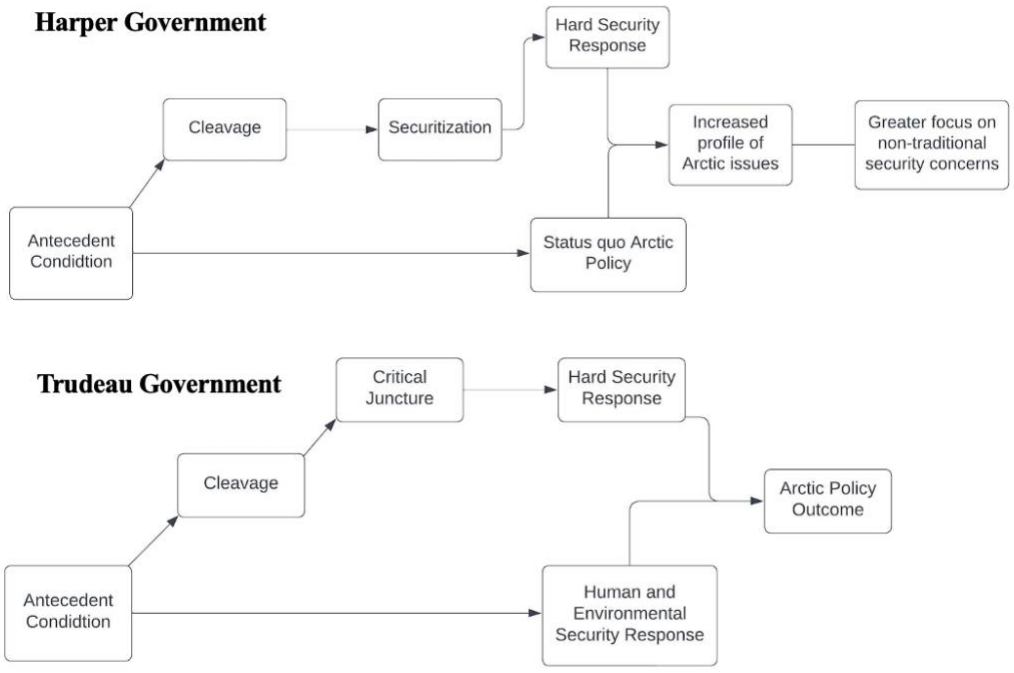
study of critical junctures and the assessment of causality (Kaufman 2017, 16). Contingency requires that the characteristics of the critical juncture not constrain the agency of actors, providing numerous potential response pathways. This contrasts with determinism, where an actor's response to an event is all but pre-determined by the characteristics of that event.

Slater and Simmons (2010, 890) add that it is necessary to delineate between the causal and noncausal status of antecedent events in a critical juncture. An actor's agency and contingency are causal factors in path selection, but the primary focus is on the antecedent conditions (Capoccia 2015, 156). Agency causes pathway selection and may cause future pathway deviation, though this is not necessarily an important causal factor regarding path dependence analysis (Capoccia 2015, 157). Contingency is critical to causality as it introduces the concept of a counterfactual scenario (Berlin 1974, 176).

The concept of path dependence carries the fundamental assumption that past events constrain future choices (Pierson 2000, 254). The research of this thesis begins with an analysis of Canadian Arctic policy, beginning with its modern origins at the onset of the Cold War. This presents a pattern of reactionary Arctic policies with minimal follow through. The repetition of this pattern creates a customary mechanism that makes deviation more difficult through a convention of historical precedent.

Literature distinguishes between different types of path-dependent explanations based on the mechanism of policy production, characteristics of relevant institutions, and the mechanism of change. In this case, the use of the "Arctic card" by past governments constitutes a functional explanation of path dependence. Initially derived from anthropology, the theory of functional explanations proposes that within a given social structure, certain practices are observed to repeat in response to external stimulus (Stinchcombe 1968, 104). The following diagrams are adapted

from the path dependence framework presented by Paul A. David (1985, 30). The key puzzle for this thesis is explaining why a language of hard security emerged under both the Harper and the Trudeau governments.



Reproduction might occur for many reasons such as, select actors receiving benefits from this behaviour, pressure from social norms, the absence of any need to diverge from convention, or stubbornness (Stinchcombe 1968, 104). Even social practices that carry a few negative consequences will continue so long as they serve their function. James Mahoney adds that behaviour is often reproduced because it serves a valued function within the overall system, though its repeated nature implies that institutions may be less functional (Mahoney 2000, 517).

The combination of securitization theory, critical junctures, and path dependence culminates in an ontological security lens that captures the factors that explain the Government of Canada's decision to securitize the Arctic. The use of document analysis provides an examination of Canada's autobiographical narratives. These narratives are crucial to understand

the state's perception of the world, their relative position, and their existential anxieties (Mitzen 2006, 438). To date, this type of historical analysis that also includes an application of securitization theory in uncommon in Arctic literature (Gricius 2023, 3). This methodology helps to identify the causal connections between Canada's decision to securitize the Arctic and the geopolitical conditions that surrounded the decision-making timeframe, namely the absence of the United States as a significant actor in the Arctic.

The critical juncture and path dependence model provides a framework for contextualizing securitization under Harper and the shift from non-traditional security back to hard security under the Trudeau government. Under this framework, antecedent conditions created a cleavage or crisis, reflective of tensions preceding a critical juncture. However, as explored in the literature review, the conditions surrounding the Harper government's act of securitization do not constitute a critical juncture. Instead, the evolving ambiguity of the post-Cold War era constitutes a cleavage, defined as the tensions building up to a critical juncture.

Survey of Arctic-Related Policies

Cold War

Arctic security first became a concern for Canada during the Second World War. In 1942, the Japanese military launched a series of attacks against islands across the Pacific and seized control of several of the Aleutian Islands off the coast of Alaska. Fearing that the Japanese would use the islands as a staging ground for an attack, Canada and the United States built a highway connecting Dawson Creek, British Columbia and Fairbanks, Alaska, to facilitate the largescale movement of personnel and military equipment to defend the continent. Japan retained control of the Islands for nearly one year until a joint amphibious invasion by Canadian and American forces in the summer of 1943 that saw the United States retake control of the Islands.

The war with Japan foreshadowed the future of Canadian Arctic defence policy. Canada contributed 86% of the land required to build the Alaska Highway, though the project was paid for by the United States (Lajeunesse 2007, 55). This is the first instance of a recurring theme of Canada struggling to independently produce infrastructure and patrol remote areas.

When the war with Japan came to an end, the threat in the Arctic was replaced by the Soviet Union. Cold War-era interest in the Arctic came from the region's position as a direct route of attack between the Soviet Union and the United States. Concerns relating to North American Arctic security pertained to what the Soviets could do *through* the Canadian Arctic, with relatively little thought given to what the Soviets would ever do *to* the Canadian Arctic. A ground invasion of the Arctic was never considered a realistic threat. The Arctic Archipelago is mostly undefended by conventional military forces but carries an inhospitable climate, incredibly little infrastructure, and is very far removed from the population centres in southern Canada and in the United States. In short, there is little to be gained from a costly Soviet invasion of the Canadian Arctic.

Being the throughway of a direct attack led Canada to adopt a strong commitment to overlapping American security interests. Surveillance and response readiness became the hallmarks of North American Arctic security. This resulted in the construction of the Distance and Early Warning Line (now North Warning System), a series of radars that stretch across the Arctic coast from Alaska to Greenland to Newfoundland and led to the creation of the North American Aerospace Defence Command (NORAD) in 1957.

Stable great power politics over the circumpolar region allowed domestic concerns to rise to the forefront of Arctic policy discussions at the federal level through the 1970s and 1980s. Indigenous interest groups emerged an influential forces in Canadian politics, sparking the

pursuit of comprehensive land claim agreements between the Crown and Northern indigenous peoples (Calder et al. v. Attorney-General of British Columbia 1973). This corresponded with a growing concern among the general population about environmental changes that began to frame the Arctic as a region that needs care.

This new perception of the Arctic presents a contradiction. The region is traditionally viewed as the desolate last frontier where the prospects for resource development provide new economic opportunities. However, the Arctic is also acknowledged as the tradition homeland of the Inuit and other cultures, thus not a frontier, where local groups have a right to participate in decisions about what happens on their ancestral lands. The emerging domestic narrative is indicative of Canada's limited bandwidth when it comes to Arctic affairs, particularly when the NWP is not being discussed. Arctic policy discourse devolved into a series of domestic issues, sidelining any systematic approach to Arctic defence or a circumpolar agenda.

As a result, Canada never developed a comprehensive Arctic policy over this period. Ottawa's preoccupation with settling land claim agreements limited their thinking of Arctic politics beyond Canada's borders. Political leadership did not demonstrate an interest in coordinating Arctic policy with foreign actors, nor did relevant agencies such as the departments of External Affairs or National Defence publish documents pertaining to a circumpolar policy.

The later decades of the Cold War demonstrate that Canada's interest in the international side of Arctic policy is conditional on pressure from the United States, or a perceived sovereignty crisis related to the NWP. Such a crisis emerged when the USCGC *Polar Sea* traveled from Greenland to Alaska via the NWP in July of 1985 without prior authorization from the Government of Canada. This incident briefly revitalized Canada's interest in the foreign dimension of Arctic politics through Canada's pledge to protect its internal waters, evident in the

presentation of the *Policy on Canadian Sovereignty,* to the House of Common's months later. Ottawa also negotiated a compromise with the United States base their "special relationship" (Lajeunesse 2024, 257). They agreed that all US maritime activity within Canada's claim will request permission, and permission will always be granted. In effect, an agree-to-disagree stance that accommodates both states' interests.

The other component of Canada's pledge to protect its waters was to improve its operational capacity. The Polar 8 Project was introduced in 1986 as a shipbuilding project for a heavy class icebreaker for the Coast Guard to operate along the NWP year-round. However, the project did not develop a competed design for a vessel until 1988, at which point costs significantly exceeded the budget, leading to its cancelation. As a stop-gap measure, Canada's largest icebreaker, the CCGS *Louis S. St-Laurent,* was modernize and a commercial icebreaker was purchased (Maginley 2003, 66).

Despite a significant event triggering interest in Arctic politics, any substantive focus on a regional policy or Arctic defence quickly faded. As early as the 1985 *Competitiveness and Security: Directions for Canada's International Relations* foreign policy*,* Canada's first foreign policy in 15 years, the Arctic was only briefly discussed. However, *Competitiveness and Security* released months before the *Polar Sea* incident.

The foreign policy claims that "we are an Arctic nation. The North holds a distinct place in our nationhood and sense of identity. We view it as special, and ourselves as special because of it" (Clark 1985, 1). This passage is found in the introduction of the paper and does not contain any explanation of Canada's Arctic policy or regional goals. The only other mention of the Arctic is to say that "Our interests in the Arctic … and other regions of the world are intensifying" (Clark 1985, 37).

One of the security priorities of the document states that "Control over our national territory, airspace, and coastal waters is essential, both for the assertion of our sovereignty and for the preservation of our security" (Clark 1985, 38). This would require Canada to develop effective surveillance and detection systems that can provide a continuous picture of the Arctic. Importantly, the paper also emphasises that control requires the capacity to intercept aircrafts and ships engaging in unauthorized or illegal activity, whether they be domestic or foreign. While most states exercise control over their territory as a matter of routine, the 1985 foreign policy presents that doing so in this context is a daunting task given the vast expanse of territory.

Competitiveness and Security implies that Canada's inability to dedicate enough assets to the Arctic is primarily a legacy of their management strategy throughout the Cold War. Concerned with the threat from the Soviet Union, the North American strategy shifted towards ballistic missile defence in the 1960s. Subsequent generations of Soviet long-range bombers and missiles placed the emphasis of continental defence firmly on deterrence via the threat of overwhelming retaliation. Investments in conventional defence around the Arctic could be made redundant by a nuclear armada capable of devastating the continent. The requirements to counter this threat were sufficiently met through defence cooperation with the United States and the construction of the DEW Line and its later transition into the North Warning System. Military activity or new infrastructure in the Arctic could create a concerning posture that affects the regional balance of power with the Soviet Union.

The subsequent defence policy, *Challenges and Commitment: A Defence Policy for Canada,* that released in 1987 contained explicit reference to the Soviet threat. New submarines, bombers, and cruise missile technologies are cited as principal threats from within the Arctic Circle. The defence policy finds these new technologies to transform the Arctic Ocean from a

buffer to a potential battleground. To account for this, "the Canadian navy must be able to determine what is happening under the ice in the Canadian Arctic, and to deter hostile or potentially hostile intrusions" (National Defence 1987, 78). As a result, the government promised to modernize air defences and develop a sub-surface sonar system and a fleet of nuclear-powered submarines that could help control Arctic waters.

Even towards the end of the Cold War under the Mulroney government, Canada had yet to produce a comprehensive regional strategy. The Arctic-related components of Canada's foreign and defence policies expressed interests, goals, and concerns in the region but never amounted to a circumpolar agenda. The closest document to an Arctic-specific policy from the Cold War is the Ministry of Indian Affairs and Northern Development's *Looking North: Canada's Arctic Commitment,* published in January of 1989. It provides an overview of the actions and objectives of the federal government that were underway in northern Canada. However, *Looking North* constitutes a wholly domestic policy framework that responds to the unique issues affecting northern Canadians. The document continues the federal government's domestic priority of settling indigenous land claims, while also advocating for economic development, and asserts the role of the federal government in protecting the sovereignty of the region.

Post-Cold War Era

When the Soviet Union collapsed, the North American Arctic framework shifted from continental security to multilateral cooperation, similar in spirit to Gorbachev's "zone of peace." The Chrétien-led Liberal government promised to pursue the concept of circumpolar governance that was initially articulated by Mulroney. The 1994 white paper, *Canada in the World: Canadian Foreign Policy,* provides a modern perspective on the Arctic in a new geopolitical era.

It reiterates the burden of Canada's vast and diverse geography on military resources, though it adds an interpretation of sovereignty. "For Canada, sovereignty means ensuring that, within our area of jurisdiction, Canadian law is respected and enforced. The government is determined to see that this is so" (National Defence 1994, 17).

Canada in the World is significant for addressing the geopolitical changes following the collapse of the Soviet Union. It contends that there is still a need for the armed forces to play a traditional role in national defence. Self-reliance is presented to be of the utmost importance and Canadian security should not become the responsibility of others, especially in the wake of political sovereignty concerns stemming from NAFTA (National Defence 1994, 17). National Defence intends to meet this goal in the Arctic by investing in capacity building efforts (National Defence 1994, 34). However, the paper only mentions the Arctic three other times. Twice when describing Canada's diverse geography and once to mention regional cooperation with the United States.

US President Bill Clinton's willingness to sign onto a treaty for circumpolar governance culminated in the creation of the Arctic Council in September of 1996 through the signing of the Ottawa Declaration. The resulting optimism promised an *Arctic* dimension for future Canadian foreign policies and a departure from the decades of reactive ad-hoc policies. The creation of the Arctic Council signaled a shift away from a "Mercator mind-set" in Canadian foreign policy that historically viewed the Arctic as a peripheral region (Honderich 1987, 9). To break from Canada's pattern of episodic Arctic policies, an Arctic vision would need to expand beyond sovereignty and continental security to produce a comprehensive regional agenda.

Canada had the opportunity to hold the first chairmanship of the Council and set the organization's agenda from 1996 to 1998. They chose to focus on youth development,

socioeconomic issues affecting children, and developing closer partnerships with indigenous peoples and Arctic states to address common challenges and opportunities. However, this approach was a narrow focus on the Canadian Arctic that did not account for the significant sub-regional differences across the Circumpolar Arctic (Østhagen, Sharp and Hilde 2018, 164).

The next Arctic policy, *The Northern Dimension of Canadian Foreign Policy,* released in 2000 with a clear emphasis on socioeconomic challenges. The policy presents four overarching objectives: enhance the security and prosperity of Canadians, specifically northerns and indigenous people; bolster and maintain Canadian sovereignty; establish the circumpolar region as a geopolitical entity incorporated into the rules-based international order; and promote sustainable development in the Arctic. The new geopolitical order, referred to as "the politics of globalization and power diffusion," is seen as an opportunity to highlight the significance of the Arctic Circle as a region of inclusion and cooperation (Department of Foreign Affiars and International Trade 2000, 1).

In 2004, under the Paul Martin government, a new Arctic policy released. *Developing Your Northern Strategy* was touted as the "first-ever comprehensive strategy for the North, in cooperation with Aboriginal governments, organizations, and northern residents." It presented a vision for the North as "a healthy place where self-reliant individuals live in healthy, viable communities, and where northerners manage their own affairs" (Indian and Northern Affairs Canada 2004, 2). A region where decision-making is rooted in the principles of sustainable development and respect for the land. It presented seven goals: Strengthening Governance, Partnerships and Institutions; Establishing Strong Foundations for Economic Development; Protecting the Environment; Building Healthy and Safe Communities; Reinforcing Sovereignty,

National Security and Circumpolar Cooperation; Preserving, Revitalizing and Promoting Culture and Identity; and Developing Northern Science and Research.

The 2005 *International Policy Statement* presents a "New Domestic Context," where the Canadian security discourse shifted towards concerns over the military's ability to respond to asymmetric threats. This means that the government must work on its ability to gather information and quickly response to a wide array of potential threats via land, air, and sea. This is presented as a particular concern for the Arctic, where there is growing activity. The Arctic was identified as a new priority region due to "increased security threats, a changed distribution of global power, challenges to existing international institutions, and transformation of the global economy" (Canada 2005, 30). Civilian air traffic through the North is increasing and commercial shipping activity is hypothesised by the policy statement to dramatically increase should the NWP become navigable. However, these forms of activity do not present the same security threats as they would have during the Cold War. Instead, Canada's main security concerns were environmental protection and organized crime. In fact, the primary security threats identified in the policy stem from terrorism, domestic emergencies, illegal fishing, illegal migration, and drug trafficking. The policy called for greater surveillance and search and rescue capabilities. However, the 2005 policy was never acted upon due to a change in government following the Marin Liberal's election loss in January of 2006 to the Harper-led Progressive Conservative Party.

Securitization Under the Harper Government

The Canadian Arctic was a hallmark talking point of the Conservative Party's 2005-2006 election campaign, whereas Arctic rhetoric never presented significantly in past federal elections. Harper cited Canada's Arctic sovereignty as a "crisis" issue and placed a strong emphasis on

Canada's need to allocate the military capital necessary to be capable of sufficiently responding to regional threats. This was a part of the Conservative's broader election platform that promised to increase defence spending.

During a campaign speech in Winnipeg, Harper said, "The single most important duty of the federal government is to protect and defend our national sovereignty," pledging that such a principle will be an integral part of a "Canada first" defence commitment (Harper 2005). His speech goes on to say that Canada's sovereignty is under threat in the far north and that this is a call to action. This marks the first significant instance at an attempt at securitization. He continued, "It's time to act to defend Canadian sovereignty. A Conservative government will make the military investments needed to secure our borders. You don't defend national sovereignty with flags, cheap election rhetoric, and advertising campaigns. You need forces on the ground, ships in the sea, and proper surveillance." This choice of language reinforced the government's focus on hard security matters in the region, met with a military-led solution of boots on the ground. Surprisingly, the speech in Winnipeg makes no reference to Canada's biggest defence priority at the time, the war in Afghanistan.

In August of 2006, Harper delivered two speeches in the territories, now as the Prime Minister. The first, in Iqaluit, called *Securing Canadian Sovereignty in the Arctic*, presented his most influential statement, "the first principle of Arctic sovereignty: use it or lose it" (Harper 2006A). He claimed that previous governments "have failed in their duty to rigorously enforce Canada's sovereignty in the Arctic. They have failed to provide enough resources to comprehensively monitor, patrol and protect our northern waters. As a result, foreign ships routinely sailed through our territory without permission." Since the legal status of the NWP is not explicitly established under international law, there is a common belief that if international

courts were to decide its status, they would do so by considering historic precedent. A precedent that Canada would like to demonstrate full control over. However, Harper's speech claims that these unapproved voyages represent a "threat to Canadians' safety and security," rather than the more accurate concern that these instances threaten Canada's sovereign claim to the NWP by affecting precedent.

The speech called for aerial surveillance drones to conduct continuous patrols in the region, investments in sonar technology, the construction of a deep-water port, and expanding the army's presence with a new Arctic training centre in Yellowknife. Harper refuted critics who consider this focus on Arctic sovereignty to be an unnecessary expense by claiming that the region will be increasingly important in the decades to come because of the increasing value of oil, natural gas, and mineral deposits. "In short, the economics and the strategic value of northern resource development are growing ever more attractive and critical to our nation. And trust me, it is not only Canadians who are noticing." This implied interest from foreign actors sought to justify his calls to assert sovereignty and take pre-emptive actions to protect Canada's Arctic.

Harper's subsequent speech delivered five days later in Yellowknife was titled, *The Call of the North*. In it, he acknowledged the historic disconnect between southern and northern Canada. Specifically, how many issues in the North are unique to the region and how most Canadians have a romanticised perception of the Arctic consistent with an Arctic national identity without understanding the realities of the region.

During this speech Harper also reiterated his most staying remark, "the first principle of Arctic sovereignty: use it or lose it." The infamous "use it or lose it" quote is an homage to John A. MacDonald's statement about expanding Canadian settlements westward into Rupert's Land and the Northwest Territories, "were we so faint-hearted as not to take possession of it, the

Americans would be only too glad of the opportunity [to] hoist the American flag." Harper's speech and subsequent declarations by his Cabinet early into his tenure clearly demonstrated the government's intention to "use it," implying the existence of a foreign threat that wanted Canada to "lose it."

He argued, "you can't defend sovereignty with words alone," committing to an increased military presence on land, sea, and skies to "secure our northern border" (Harper 2006B). The major motivation for this push towards the Arctic and issue of sovereignty was resources. He called it the "opportunity of a millennium," speculating that the North may develop into "the next Alberta." Exercising sovereignty was seen as solely the military's responsibility, reemphasising a hard security mindset. Minister of National Defence, Gordon O'Conner, reinforced this approach by saying:

> "I want to be able to have the Navy, Army, and Air Force operate on a regular basis throughout the Arctic. So, we are going to be acquiring naval ships that allow the Navy to go through the Arctic. We're going to increase the ranger sizes so there are more rangers. We're going to increase the frequency of their patrols. We're going to get them better equipment. We're also going to get some more aircraft up in the north so that the Air Force can operate more frequently in the north."

He also claimed that the government will be "bringing on-line satellites soon that will scan the Arctic on a regular basis. The other piece we intend to implement is to put some kind of sensor in the Northwest Passage channel, so we keep track of submarines." The government promised to 'use' Canada's sovereignty over the Arctic by expanding the Canadian Rangers to have an active presence in the region, constructing new Arctic Offshore Patrol Ships, building deep water docking and refueling stations, enhancing surveillance capabilities, conducting regional military exercises, and establishing a Reserve unit to be based in Yellowknife. These

policy proposals fit into the Conservative government's wider mandate to rebuild the Canadian Armed Forces.

Harper's 2007 Throne Speech added more nuance about the government's vision for the future of Arctic policy. He stated that "the North needs new attention," in part because of "new opportunities [that] are emerging across the Arctic" (Harper 2007). The speech promises that the government will produce an integrated northern strategy that focuses on Canadian sovereignty, protects the region's natural heritage, promotes economic and social development, and supports the devolution of northern governance. In addition to the military-led approach to asserting sovereignty, the government also reiterated an election promise to comprehensively map Canada's Arctic seabed.

This series of speech acts early into Harper's tenure as Prime Minister constructed a narrative that framed Arctic sovereignty as an integral part of state survival that is under threat from external actors. A part of Canada's national identity is at risk and action is needed to defend it. This frames a strategic problem that carries a military solution, which requires significantly more investment in the far north, beyond what would typically be considered in normal political discourse. In conjunction with the growing public awareness about climate change through the 2000s, the political narrative of sovereignty used the reality of melting sea ice to hyperbolise a foreign threat, rather than address a growing environmental security concern.

These speech acts also coincided with Russia's highly publicised flag planting at the seabed of the North Pole. Shortly afterwards, President Vladimir Putin said that Russia will resume long-range flights by strategic bombers over the Arctic "on a permanent basis" (Associated Press 2007). These factors help explain the resurgence in media and academic publications that speculated about a new "race for the Arctic" in 2007.

Russia's flag planting was widely covered in public media but dismissed by politicians and most academics. In response, Canadian Foreign Minister Peter Mackay said, "This isn't the fifteenth century. You can't go around the world and just plant flags and say, 'we're claiming this territory,'" finishing, "basically, it is just a show by Russia" (Reuters 2007). Chief of Defence Staff, Gen. Walt Natynczyk said, "if a country invades the Canadian Arctic, my first challenge is search and rescue to help them out" (Proceedings 2010, 20). The United States echoed a similar dismissive sentiment with a White House statement, "If Russia feels as though they want to take some of [their] old aircraft out of mothballs and get them flying again, that's their decision" (Associated Press 2007).

The Harper government's approach to Arctic security was formally presented in 2008 in their only defence policy, *Canada First: Defence Strategy.* The opening message from the Prime Minister presented the government's commitment to fulfill their obligation of "defending" Canadian sovereignty (National Defence 2008, 1). The Arctic is not a focal point of *Canada First*, which instead focuses on modernizing the CAF, increasing support for the military, adapting to asymmetric conflicts, and ensuring Canada is a reliable international partner. However, discussions of the Arctic express a concern for illegal activity that could have ramifications on Canadian sovereignty, which demands improved surveillance capabilities and for the Canadian Forces to develop "the capacity to exercise control over and defend Canada's sovereignty in the Arctic" (National Defence 2008, 8).

However, *Canada First* presents a less urgent tone than Harper's speeches. The foreign threats and challenges to Canada are described in vague phrases like, "new challenges from other shores" in reference to economic opportunities in the region, a security environment that is characterised by "uncertainty," "foreign encroachment on Canada's natural resources," and "new

challenges" that stem from "new opportunities." While the defence policy still placed the military at the forefront of the sovereignty issue, it is also presented it in a support role for other civilian agencies with a growing presence in the North. This tempered approach to hard security was embodied by the earlier Ilulissat Declaration, signed in May of 2008 by the five Arctic coastal states. The declaration provides that all signatories will abide by UNCLOS and peacefully resolve sovereignty claims or overlapping territorial disputes through international law. In theory, the Ilulissat Declaration reduces Canada's need to adhere to a self-help framework for protecting its sovereignty.

The government's Arctic policy was unveiled in July of 2009 in *Canada's Northern Strategy: Our North, Our Heritage, Our Future.* The policy expanded on the four pillars communicated in the 2007 Throne Speech. Regarding sovereignty, the policy championed the government's commitment to strengthening Canada's Arctic presence by "putting more boots on the Arctic tundra, more ships in the icy water and a better eye-in-the-sky." The remaining three pillars promoted social and economic development, the protection of environmental heritage, and improving and devolving Northern governance, comprising a domestic component of Arctic policy. The *Northern Strategy* demonstrated a wider commitment by the federal government to simultaneous focus on international and domestic domains by shifting the emphasis of Arctic policy onto human and environmental security.

In 2010, the Department of Foreign Affairs released their *Statement on Canada's Arctic Foreign Policy: Exercising Sovereignty and Promoting Canada's NORTHERN STRATEGY Abroad*, a companion piece that expanded upon the international dimension of the government's Arctic policy to established Canada as an "Arctic power" (Department of Foreign Affairs 2010, 4). As the title suggests, exercising sovereignty over the Arctic is repeatedly stated as Canada's

"number one Arctic foreign policy priority." The *Statement* presented a vision for the Arctic as "a rules-based region with clearly defined boundaries, dynamic economic growth and trade, vibrant northern communities, and healthy and productive ecosystems." The document is consistent with a hard security approach to the Arctic, albeit with an opportunity to pay more attention to the effects of climate change.

Arctic security concerns were tempered in June of 2010 when the Canadian Standing Committee on National Defence concluded that "there is no immediate military threat to Canadian territories" (Standing Committee on National Defence 2010, 5). The Committee explained that the current major challenges in the region are not directly applicable to traditional military actions. More pressing than a sovereignty threat is a domestic policing threat, which does not require combat capabilities (Standing Committee on National Defence 2010, 7).

While Harper's strong rhetoric resonated with much of the public, it did not result in the significant action that was promised. Harper's first five years in office was under a minority government, limiting the government's ability to act on highly politicised topics that were not important parts of other parties' agendas. By 2011, when the Conservatives earned a majority government, action on Arctic policies became significantly bogged down until the end of the Harper government. One of the key limiting factors was procurement issues highlighted by the government's failure to replace the CF-18 fighter jets, develop a national shipbuilding strategy, or coordinate the construction of a naval port in Nanisivik on the coast of Baffin Island. The government further underestimated the difficulty of operating and building infrastructure in the Arctic, with numerous projects going over budget causing them to be shrunk or cancelled. Furthermore, even though the public expressed support for the government to take more action in

the far north, Arctic issues ranked very low on the political agenda, well behind socioeconomic and quality of life concerns (McCormack 2020, 437).

Strong Arctic rhetoric did not receive a full buy-in by key departmental stakeholder like National Defence. Limited personnel, infrastructure, equipment, budget, and the lack of a clear physical threat prevented National Defence from pursuing a more active role in the Arctic, vindicated by the Canadian Standing Committee on National Defence's 2010 statement. These restrictions and the attention being paid to non-traditional security concerns by other government agencies resigned the military to a support role, constituting a whole-of-government approach to simultaneously address socioeconomic and environmental issues.

Hard Security Under the Trudeau Government

In contrast to the Harper election in 2006, the election campaign leading up to 2015's Justin Trudeau-led Liberal Party's victory was not significantly concerned with Arctic politics or Arctic-specific issues. However, the Arctic was not neglected by the new government. Early on, Trudeau promised to address matters of Indigenous reconciliation and environmental protections, which necessitates some amount of consideration for northern and Arctic issues. The new Cabinet's mandate letters emphasised as much when they read, "no relationship is more important … to Canada than the one with Indigenous Peoples. It is time for a renewed, nation-to-nation relationship with Indigenous Peoples, based on recognition of rights, respect, co-operation, and partnership." This excerpt was repeated in all mandate letters in 2017 and 2018, and a similar message presented in subsequent letters, including the most recent in 2021.

This commitment to reconciliation was highlighted in the new government's first major Arctic foreign policy document, the *Joint Statement on Environment, Climate Change, and Arctic Leadership,* produced in cooperation with Trudeau's American counterpart, President

Barack Obama. It presents a mutual commitment to science-based resource management, respect for the rights and territory of Indigenous peoples, and a commitment to work together to establish common shipping practices and identify low-impact shipping lanes throughout the region. The Joint Statement also presents the Liberal government's intent to establish a new Arctic Policy Framework in collaboration with Northern and Indigenous stakeholders to replace *Canada's Northern Strategy*.

The first defence policy under the new government was *Strong, Secure, Engaged: Canada's Defence Policy,* released in 2017. The title lends itself to the mantra of Canada being strong at home, secure in North America, and engaged in the world, emphasising domestic capacity, regional defence and security, and active involvement in international activities, namely peacekeeping. It is the first defence policy released since *Canada First* and describes itself as a "deliberately ambitious" effort to support the Canadian Armed Forces to build their capacity and capabilities. *SSE* presents three priorities to pursue over a twenty-year time frame: increase the size of the Canadian Armed Forces; affirm Canada's commitment to its alliances and partnerships; and invest in the military to ensure personnel have the tools needed for success. References to the Arctic primarily occur within the context of increasing domain awareness through surveillance capabilities and increasing the CAF's ability to operate in the region through investments in all-terrain vehicles and Offshore Patrol Ships.

The defence policy presents an optimistic view of circumpolar cooperation. It explains that all eight Arctic states "have an enduring interest" in continuing "productive collaboration" through the Arctic Council (National Defence 2017, 50). The policy continues Harper's approach of framing climate change as a defence issue by way of melting sea ice and its potential to increase human activity in the region, rather than presenting climate change as an inherent

security threat. *SSE* claims that a growing number of commercial actors, researchers, and an expanding tourism industry will come to northern Canada, creating new safety and security demands.

The Trudeau government's first Arctic-specific policy document was *Canada's Arctic and Northern Policy Framework,* released in September of 2019. The *ANPF* uses its first paragraph to address the fact that Canada's Arctic residents still do not have equal access to services, opportunities, and the living standards enjoyed by most other Canadians. These discrepancies between the North and the South are most prevalent in issues of transportation, housing, energy, food security, employment, infrastructure, health, and education. The foreword from the Minister of Crown-Indigenous Relations and Northern Affairs claims that although past governments put forward northern strategies, "none closed these gaps for the people of the North or created a lasting legacy of sustainable economic development."

ANPF's policy framework presents eight primary goals that mostly focus on improving socioeconomic outcomes for northern residents, supporting a healthly ecosystem, conducting science-based decision making, and reconciliation to support Indigenous self-determination. The framework is predominantly concerned with domestic issues that affect northern residents, though it includes two goals that emphasise the international dimension of Arctic policy. The sixth and seventh goals are respectively, to ensure that a "rules-based international order in the Arctic responds effectively to new challenges and opportunities," and ensure that "the Canadian Arctic and North and its people are safe, secure, and well-defended." The Arctic Council is again acknowledged as the "pre-eminent forum for Arctic cooperation," alongside UNCLOS as an international legal framework that applies to the Arctic Ocean.

The message of the *ANPF* focuses on the government's domestic Arctic priorities, however, the limited attention given to the international dimension emphasises the creation of circumpolar conditions where Canada can find success in achieving its domestic goals. The purpose of the policy is to present an outline of the region where "Arctic and Northern peoples thrive economically, socially and environmentally." Any broader circumpolar policy is based on creating the external political condition needed to meet and support that vision. This implies a direction for the military's support role in fostering this vision. A chapter of the *ANPF* titled, "Safety, security and defence," presents a policy outline to address environmental security, growing foreign interest in the region, and sovereignty. It begins by stating that safety, security, and defence are essential prerequisites for healthy communities, a strong economy, and a sustainable environment, reemphasising the notion that the international component of the *ANPF* exists to facilitate the domestic goals.

Both *SSE* and *ANPF* make multiple references to the CAF's role in "defending" Arctic sovereignty. However, hard security concerns in the region are overshadowed by the goal of revitalising the Canadian Forces, promoting international cooperation, and addressing systemic socioeconomic issues in northern Canada. Thus, the military was resigned to a support role in region. However, this framework was seemingly reversed by the subsequent national defence policy.

The government released its most recent defence policy, *Our North, Strong, and Free: A Renewed Vision for Canada's Defence*, in April of 2024. The tone of the policy document is a far cry from *SSE*'s presentation of the Arctic defence theatre. The opening paragraph of *SSE* is as follows:

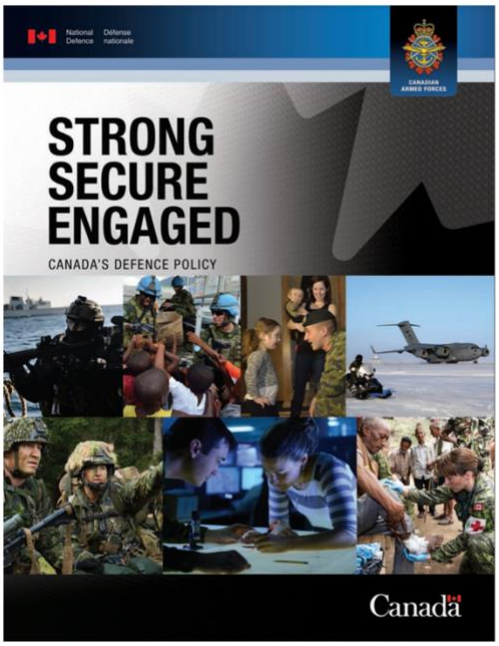
> People are at the core of everything the Canadian Armed Forces does to deliver on its mandate. As we look to the future, we will also refocus our efforts on ensuring the entire Defence team has the care, services and support it requires. Doing so will be central to attracting and retaining the people we need to keep Canada strong, secure, and engaged in the world. Investing in our people is the single most important commitment we can make.

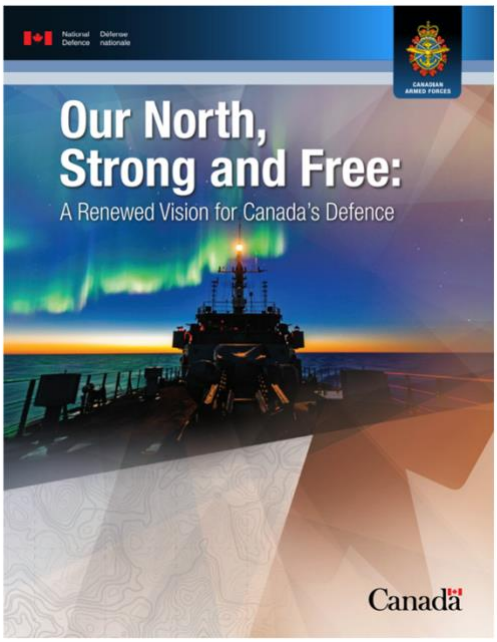
In stark contrast, *ONSF* says:

> A more challenging world is already having far-reaching impacts on the day-to-day lives of Canadians.
>
> A rapidly changing climate, new challenges to global stability, and accelerating advances in technology are affecting the foundations of Canadian security and prosperity. *Our North, Strong and Free* responds to these trends with resolve and commitment.

This presents two dramatically different tones between the two defence policies of the Trudeau government. *SSE* presented the case for building the CAF's capabilities and supporting its members to a enhance Canada's ability to be engaged in the world. Conversely, the new defence policy prioritises hard security concerns emphasising regional security issues over global matters. It is in part a message about what is required to preserve the physical safety and security of Canada, reminiscent of rhetoric from the Harper government.

Several key items stand out in the new defence policy's presentation. The cover photo features a naval vessel operating in Arctic waters under the northern lights, a signal that this "renewed vision for Canada's defence" positions Arctic security at the forefront. This is reinforced by the title, "*Our North*." Additionally, the first non-introductory section of the new policy is, "Climate Change and Its Destabilizing Impacts on Our Arctic and North." At the onset of this newest defence policy, the Arctic is presented as a crucial if not the preeminent region of national security.





ONSF is a direct response to the geopolitical uncertainty produced by the contemporary Arctic security context that underwent significant change since 2017. This era of uncertainty primarily stem from Russian and Chinese actions in the Arctic. These factors constitute a critical juncture that emerged during the Trudeau government, which partial explain the *ONSF's* pivot to hard security issues.

There is growing instability caused by Russia's resumption of long-range aviation patrols, instances of election interference, limited communication through multi-lateral and bilateral forums, Moscow's demonstrated willingness to break international norms, and the invasion of Ukraine in 2022. With uneasy relations with Moscow, Russia is a concern in the region through the "tyranny of geography" (Huebert 2019, 75). Russia has a legitimate need to invest in Arctic infrastructure and coastal capabilities. Many of Russia's coastal activities are associated with revitalizing its ports to support shipping activity through the Northern Sea Route and accommodate the expansion of extractive industries in accordance with legitimate state business (Gramer 2017). However, given the significant deterioration in Russia-Western

relations, the construction of deep-sea ports, runways, modernization of Cold War-era facilities, advanced warning systems, surveillance capabilities, hypersonic delivery systems, advancements in submarine technology, and other events all contribute to Canada's growing anxiety about regional stability. Russia's mixed signals does not mean war is likely. However, these actions prompt calls for Canada to respond though NORAD modernization and the rejuvenation of NATO's maritime control capabilities (Bouffard, Charron and Fergusson 2019, 70). This in turn requires Canada to develop a much greater capacity to operate in the Arctic.

However, the long-term geopolitical concern is China. One difficulty Arctic states face is that Beijing insists on having a seat at the table. In China's first ever Arctic policy white paper released in 2018, China defined itself as a "near-Arctic state," and a major stakeholder in Arctic affairs (People's Republic of China 2018). This is notable as no other observer state in the Arctic Council self-identifies as "near-Arctic." Beijing further asserts that the Arctic region is a global interest, and China will work towards building a "community for the shared future of all mankind in the Arctic region" (People's Republic of China 2018). This statement conflicts with the views and interests of the eight Arctic states who seek to address circumpolar issues through transparent but closed regional forums like the Arctic Council and view outside interference as an infringement on their sovereign territorial rights.

China's stated goal in the Arctic is "to understand, protect, develop and participate in the governance of the Arctic, so as to safeguard the common interests of all countries and the international community in the Arctic, and promote [the] sustainable development of the Arctic" (People's Republic of China 2018). However, China also describes the Arctic as one of the world's "new strategic frontiers," akin to the Antarctic, high seas, and space, where resources should be shared by the global population (Doshi, Dale-Huang and Zhang 2021). More

specifically, the Arctic is of growing importance to China's large-scale Belt and Road Initiative through economic integration, stable access to resources, and shipping routes that link China with Europe through the Arctic Ocean. This ignores the fact that 89% of Arctic territory is within established EEZs.

China's short-term interest in the Arctic is liquified natural gas, while commercial shipping remains the long-term goal as Arctic passages become more viable (Dams, van Schaik and Stoetman 2020, 10). This creates closer partnership between China and Russia, particularly since the European sanctions against Russia for invading Ukraine. Their relationship goes beyond a simple economic transaction as a fleet of 11 Chinese and Russian warships sailed from the Sea of Japan, through the Bering Strait into the Pacific Ocean to conduct "joint anti-submarine and anti-aircraft exercises," indicating a closer military partnership (Kelly and Cushing 2023).

Canada is concerned about China's intentions in and around the Arctic Archipelago. The Chinese icebreaker *Xue Long* or "Snow Dragon" transited the NWP for a so-called scientific voyage in 2017 with permission from the Government of Canada. The successful journey of the vessel sparked confusion when Chinese state media labelled the event as evidence of "a new sea lane for China," unrelated to scientific research (Vanderklippe 2017). In March of 2023, the Canadian military discovered Chinese monitoring buoys within Canada's EEZ, which are capable of monitoring submarine traffic (Gilmour 2024). Further, many of the Chinese vessels that operated in the Canadian Arctic are owned and operated by the People's Liberation Army (Gilmour 2024). There are also numerous instances of China attempting to establish an Arctic foothold in other parts of the region. For example, the bid to build an airport in Greenland,

Chinese-based companies attempting to buy abandoned Danish naval bases, inviting Iceland to join the BRI, and Chinese firms attempting to by Arctic mining companies.

These factors lend themselves to newly heightened security concerns in the region since the release of *SSE* in 2017. This explains the need for a new defence policy that adapts Canada's approach to fit a new Arctic geopolitical context. It also follows suit that a similar policy development happened in the United States. The 2017 US National Security Strategy mentions the Arctic once in relation to rules-based interactions between institutions, businesses, and individuals in the region (POTUS 2017, 40). Conversely, the 2022 National Security Strategy discusses the Arctic in three separate sub-sections, including a region-specific section titled, "Maintain a Peaceful Arctic" (POTUS 2022, 44).

In keeping with previous defence policy, Canada is attempting to increase its defence budget to meet this challenge and close the spending gap on the government's NATO obligations. This primarily comes from the purchase of new fighter jets, maritime patrol aircraft, an Offshore Patrol Vessel, and a $38.6 billion investment in modernizing NORAD. The purpose these investments is to continue the mantra of keeping Canada "strong at home, secure in North America, and engaged in the world," albeit with a far greater emphasis on local capabilities and regional security. The emphasis on global engagement is largely replaced with a focus on the international dimension of Arctic security, Canada's role within NATO, and contributions to the Indo-Pacific strategy. For the Arctic, *ONSF* presents the military component for advancing the goals established in the *Arctic and Northern Policy Framework* by establishing a safe and stable circumpolar environment. It also pledges a commitment to work in partnership with Indigenous communities and northern residents, restating the phrase from the *ANPF*, "nothing about us, without us."

ONSF revitalises the Arctic security discourse on hard security concerns in the region. The justification for the proposed upgrades to continental defence are explained through their ability to "deter threats or defeat them when necessary." This is a significant shift in Canada's recent thinking about Arctic defence. It is a return to the early years of the Harper government that claimed a "crisis" in the Arctic that demanded increased military action. Examples of the new regional threats mentioned in the policy include advanced submarines, hypersonic and cruise missiles, and foreign surveillance activities.

Once again, the newest defence policy reiterates that the military's most urgent priority in the Arctic is asserting Canada's sovereignty across the far north. This is accompanied by plans to invest in personnel, equipment, infrastructure, and technological developments that all seek to improve domain awareness and the CAF's regional capabilities. In past defence policies, robust military capabilities were desired for their ability to help Canada exercise its sovereignty. However, new to *ONSF* is the expressed desire for a stronger military for the purpose of making independent decision and acting unilaterally in the Arctic. This is presented as a feature that will make Canada a more "valued partner in North American defence," implying an intention to deviate from the relatively passive role Canada historically held in North American Arctic defence.

Analysis

Explaining Securitization Around Hard Security

The presented documents from the Harper government demonstrate the securitization of the Arctic as a deliberate strategy to increase the political profile of the Arctic in Canadian politics. This conclusion is derived from several observations in the lineage of Arctic and defence policy documents. First is the historical characteristics of Canada's Arctic policy that

creates a system of precedents that informs future policymaking. The document analysis highlights the defence policy trend of bilateral and multilateral defence cooperation, with Canadian agencies working "in partnership" with allies as opposed to taking a leading role, even when the domain in question prominently features Canadian territory. For Canada, most multilateral defence activities are designed and led by the United States. This was demonstrated at the onset of Arctic defence near the end of the Second World War. Throughout the Cold War, Canadian policies supported mutual security interests with the United States and followed America's overarching strategy to contain the Soviet Union.

This is not to say that Canada's defence policy is ever subservient or dictated by the United States. There are plenty of issues where Canada refused to follow America's requests such as the 1962-63 Bomarc missile dispute, the Vietnam War, relations with Cuba, signing onto ballistic missile defence, and the 2003 Invasion of Iraq. However, there are many shared interests between the two nations. Though Canada's decision making is conducted independently, it is significantly more effective when done in cooperation and coordination with the United States. Though, at the end of the Cold War, the Arctic was not seen as a significant security concern for either state.

Since then, the United States has been commonly cited as "the reluctant Arctic power" (Huebert 2009, 2). Historically, Arctic politics centered around the region's position as a buffer between two superpowers, causing an under-politicisation in the aftermath of the Cold War (Greaves and Lackenbauer 2021, 8). The end of the Soviet threat significantly reduced attention to the region, particularly regarding the need for a proactive defence policy. Instead of asserting leadership in the region, the United States' lack of interest in the Arctic and preoccupation

elsewhere in the world made it a relatively passive circumpolar actor, content to be resigned to participation in the Arctic Council.

While the Arctic Council defines much of Canada's post-Cold War Arctic policies, the Council's explicit avoidance of military-related issues leaves Canada in a position of self-reliance regarding national security concerns. The Council's working groups and ongoing action plans seek to address mutual concerns among all Arctic states. These groups and policies primarily deal with biodiversity, pollution, and climate change research. The success of the Arctic Council in facilitating regional cooperation is in part due to its narrow focus on environmental and scientific issues, rather than acting as a mediator in political disputes.

Canada and the United States' asymmetric relationship also contributes to a system of asymmetric spending. Arctic infrastructure and assets are primarily paid for and provided by the United States for the mutual benefit of both states. Investments in Arctic defence are particularly expensive, and the United States is relatively well-positioned to foot the bill. The result is a system where Canada effectively receives subsidies on physical security by virtue of a shared security environment with the United States. This partially explains Canada's relatively low defence spending and failure to meet NATO's 2% obligation every year since the late 1980s.

Canada has a demonstrated aversion to defence spending. There are multiple instances of defence policies failing to materialise due to cost concerns such as the Polar 8 Project, the development of nuclear-powered submarines, procurement of fighter jets, specialised aircraft, new icebreakers, and attempts to modernize the NWS. This is exaggerated by the fact that successive governments reduced the staff for procuring military equipment from 9,000 in the early 1990s, to less than 4,000 by the end of the Harper government, resulting in a continued shortage under the Trudeau government (Maddison, Fraser and Cowan 2024). Thus, Canada

faces a significant political and logistical barrier to increasing defence spending. Treating the Arctic as an existential threat to Canadian sovereignty acts as a motivator to shift the regional defence spending discourse from its political mainstream, which is characterised by minimalism and reluctance, to become proactive. The policies produced by the Harper government do not imply any extreme level of spending in the Arctic but offer a significant departure from the minimalist precedent and thus constitute an attempt to dramatically change government activity in the far north.

Policy history demonstrate that Canada's reluctance to engage in military activity in the Arctic is in part caused by a close US-led security partnership. This evidence is consistent with the claim that securitization was used as a political tool to increase the profile of the Arctic. However, it does not explain why the act of securitization focused on a narrative with military-led solutions to addressing sovereignty concerns.

Harper's early narrative came from a precedent established through successive Arctic and defence policies that sought to respond to perceived violations of Canada's Arctic sovereignty. Past policies reference Arctic sovereignty with terms like establish, defend, assert, protect, strengthen, exercise, enforce, and safeguard, which imply a principal role for the military, as opposed to other agencies or organizations. This embedded framing of the issue presents a path of least political resistance for later governments to follow. This reinforces the observation that the securitization of the Arctic incorporated a greater sense of urgency without providing a significant departure from the framework that the federal government historically used to address concerns about sovereignty. The military remained at the forefront of solving the sovereignty puzzle, now accompanied by a strong political rhetoric that sought to give the military the tools they need to finally resolve the puzzle.

Absent from Harper's series of speeches in the Arctic and from his government's first defence policy was any reference to climate change or global warming. Ironically, climate change could literally result in the loss of land because of rising sea levels. Instead, the Harper government advocated for increasing human activity to deter a hypothetical foreign incursion. Months afterwards, Canada and the United States would agree on a mandate to incorporate maritime security into NORAD (Global Affairs Canada 2006). The inclusion of maritime security along the Arctic coast even implies a recognition of melting sea ice and a changing northern landscape.

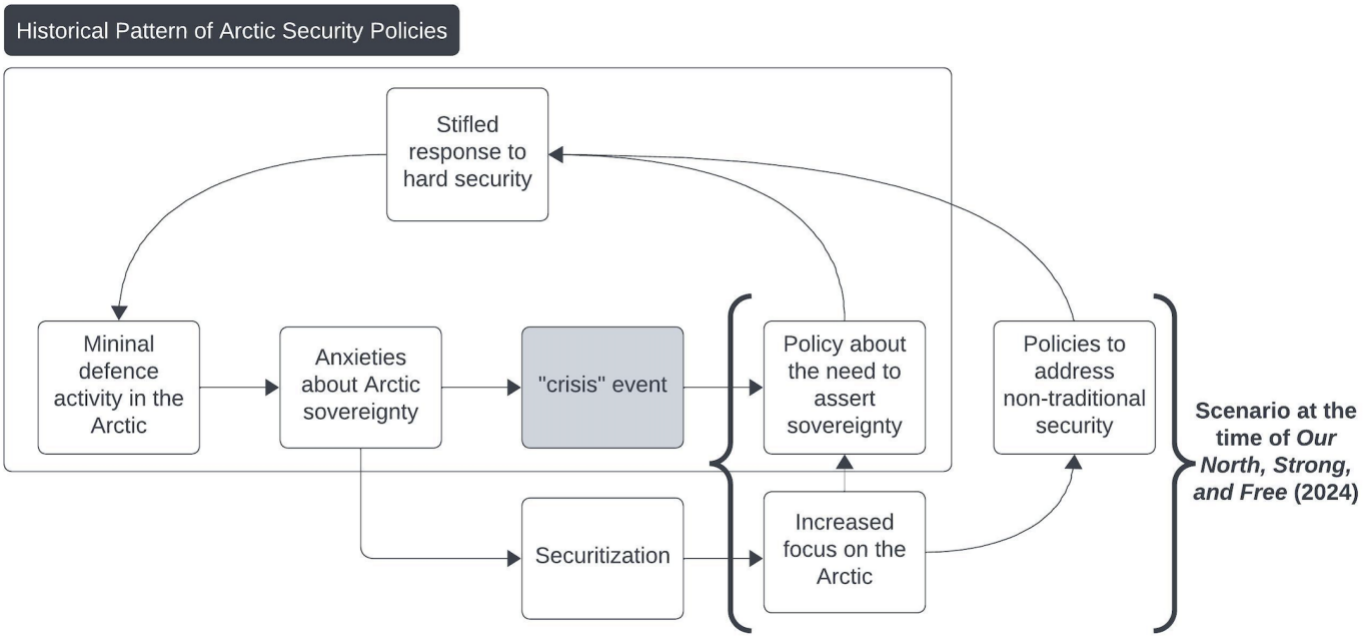
The whole-of-government approach that eventually emerged, placed the military in a support role through successive domestic policies that sought to address the more-pressing soft-security concerns of northern residents. These security concerns being climate change, poverty, housing, food security, healthcare, and public safety. This adaption towards human and environmental security developed from the increased political profile of the Arctic region. Thus, the act of securitizing the Canadian Arctic effectively instilled the political urgency to act, though the resulting actions differed from those touted in Harper's speeches.

This case of securitization is emblematic of the common "extreme offer" negotiation tactic. It is likely that the Harper government did not expect to fulfil all the infrastructure and capacity development projects the speeches and policies presented or improve military capabilities to the point of satisfying all Arctic concerns. The extreme presentation of the Arctic as a vulnerable region under a foreign threat provided motivation to do more in the region, even if the subsequent investments were not followed to their fullest extent. It is unrealistic to think that without clear evidence of an impending threat to physical security that tens of billions of dollars would be invested in hard security in the Arctic. However, overselling Arctic concerns

and presenting the case that Canada should consider this extreme scenario effectively increased political attention to the region.

Change and Continuity Under the Trudeau Government

To demonstrate change and continuity under the Harper and Trudeau governments, consider the following graph:



The "Historical Pattern" bubble illustrates the pattern of Arctic defence policies prior to the Harper government. In this loop, the military is active in the Arctic only to the extent needed to address the Soviet threat in close coordination with the United States through NORAD. Anxiety and insecurity surround the topic of Arctic sovereignty, though this is generally a non-issue given the remoteness of the region and history of limited activity. When a "crisis" event emerges, such as a foreign vessel entering the area by surprise, it provokes a policy response that reiterates the need for the military to play an active role in asserting or protecting Canadian Arctic sovereignty. These policies struggle to develop into actions due to a myriad of factors such as cost aversion, procurement issues, and a lack of political will. This returns the status of

Arctic defence policy to its minimal condition, until a new "crisis" event emerges and the cycle repeats.

Harper's securitization modified this cycle by raising the profile of the Arctic and indirectly developing a policy framework to address human and environmental security issues in the region. Securitization sought to remedy the historical "stifled response to hard security" by moving the discussion about Arctic security beyond normal politics to circumvent common issues of cost, procurement, and political will. This aspect of securitization was not successful, in part because National Defence did not fully buy-in to Harper's version of the securitization narrative and more-pressing regional goals were better suited for other agencies. It was also hampered by the fact that securitization took place in the absence of a specific crisis event, meaning National Defence did not think that the geopolitical context of the Arctic warranted the militarization of the region.

Under Trudeau, a critical juncture emerged from Arctic geopolitical changes regarding China and Russia, constituting a new "crisis" event, prompting a new policy, *ONSF,* that strongly emphasises the need to assert sovereignty. The current state of Canadian Arctic policy is one that seeks to simultaneously address ongoing threats to human and environmental security while addressing emerging hard security challenges. Though, at present, it is unclear whether *ONSF* will successfully alleviate the government's anxieties about Arctic sovereignty.

There is a clear and consistent pattern of Arctic and defence policies presenting a need to "assert sovereignty" as the motivation for engaging in circumpolar activity. Only in references to continental defence through NORAD or partnership with the United States is military activity within the Arctic circle discussed. This supports the idea presented in the literature of the proverbial "Arctic card," played by Canadian politicians to drum-up support for government

activity in the Arctic. Harper's "use it or lose it" statement is crucial to this analysis as it emphasises his government's interest in Arctic policy and implies an urgent need for Canada to act, otherwise there may be consequences to sovereignty. The act of securitizing the Arctic represents and extreme case of playing the "Arctic card" to motivate an increase in government action and attention to the Arctic, outside of the context of any verifiable external threat. Scholar, Rita Taureck, labels this use of securitization for ulterior motives as "securitization the normative practice" (2006, 59).

Under Harper, the parallel dynamic of domestic and international considerations came to characterize Arctic politics in Canada, dominated by the perhaps unintended emphasis on human and environmental security. However, the Harper government accomplished their campaign pledge of increasing the profile of the Arctic, elevating its status in both the domestic and foreign policy agendas through the process of securitization. The decline of new Arctic-related activities came about in the later part of Harper's tenure due to budgetary concerns, technical delays, and political controversies such as the procurement of new fighter jets and violations to election campaign rules (McCormack 2020, 442). When the Liberal Party formed government, they emphasised the domestic concerns of Arctic policy as they were consistent with their political mandate, without reversing the hard security approach on the international side of Arctic policy.

Discussion

Within the act of Arctic securitization, Canada presented an inconsistent interpretation of the threat. Though the referent object of Harper's securitization was not explicitly communicated, it is clear from the concerns about "foreign actors" that he and his government interpreted a potential threat to the *Canadian Arctic*, hence a strong emphasis on sovereignty. Conversely, securitization offers the possibility to treat the *Circumpolar Arctic* as a referent

object threatened by phenomena like climate change, activity by non-Arctic states, strains on regional search and rescue capabilities, and pollution. In turn, this would develop into a different response to an alternate type of threat. For example, securitizing climate change could motivate Canada to lead a multilateral effort to address a shared issue, while simultaneously fulfilling some of the international cooperation goals established by previous Arctic and foreign policies. Instead, the insular focus of securitization against foreign state-based threats and later socioeconomic domestic issues, creates a policy framework that places relatively more emphasises on self-help than international cooperation; a framework that is presented in subsequent Arctic and defence policies.

Securitization allowed the government to develop a pro-active Arctic agenda, meaning the Harper government's ambitious series of Arctic policies was a deliberate choice. This is in comparison to 'crises' such as the 1969 *Manhattan,* 1985 *Polar Sea,* or 1999 *Xue Long,* which prompted the respective reactionary policies of *Northern Canada in the 70s* in 1970*, Policy on Canadian Sovereignty* in 1985, and *The Northern Dimension of Canada's Foreign Policy* in 2000. Russia's flag planting in 2007 and resumption of strategic flights were used to validate the government's focus on hard security, but securitization efforts were underway prior to resurging Russian activity. Framing Russia's actions as instances of aggression provides legitimacy to the securitization agenda, though the effect resonated more with public media than within the government, evident by the absence of any reference to Russian actions in 2008's *Canada First.*

Securitization on the premise of hard security concerns brought significantly greater attention to security issues in the Arctic but also developed a series of competing narrative regarding the source of the threat. The threat commonly alluded to by earlier governments, and explicitly articulated since the Harper government, is foreign encroachments on Canada's Arctic

sovereignty. This threat continues to receive the most political and academic attention but does not fully capture the Arctic security environment by ignoring the multitude of non-traditional threats to human and environmental security. Given the decision to focus on hard security, it seems that the Harper government's initial conception of security followed the traditional national security framework presented in previous Arctic-related policies. This indicates an inertial paradigm that carried over from past governments, despite the region constituting a vastly different security environment in 2006 compared to during the Cold War.

Residents of northern Canada were not the target audience of Arctic securitization, evident by the fact that pressing socioeconomic issues and climate change were not the primary focus of the securitization speech acts. With a public audience of mostly southern residents, securitization was more effective by appealing to concerns in the south, rather than the relatively unique set of complicated issues affecting northern Canadians. The securitization process successfully increased the southern population's appetite for costly investments in the far north, as evident by increased support for such activities in Parliament, a political body that is accountable to the majority-southern electorate.

The policy formulation process and new Arctic activities improved the government's understanding of the socioeconomic issues that are unique to northern residents. These issues may not have been acknowledged to the same extent had the Harper government not made a deliberate effort to engage with the Arctic region. Through political intrigue in the Arctic, other government agencies shifted the discussion towards addressing non-traditional aspects of security, prompting the federal government to gradually integrate Arctic policy into a whole-of-government framework.

Demonstrated under the Trudeau government, the whole-of-government approach adapted securitization to include non-traditional threats to the Arctic. 2019's *Arctic and Northern Policy Framework* emphasised the security issues affecting Indigenous and northern residents and presents a commitment to continuing to invest in the region. The most recent 2024 defence policy, *Our North, Strong, and Free,* is a response to a changing geopolitical landscape, primarily concerned with Russia's blatant violations of international laws and uncertainty regarding China's rise to power. The policy marks a return to strong and assertive language the reemphasises hard security.

The emergence of China and Russia as "near peer" competitors with unknown intentions in the region re-invigorated American Arctic defence activities as well (Charron 2019, 94). This is evident by the United States' 2022 Nation Strategy for the Arctic Region, which addresses America's growing concerns in the region and provides a much stronger commitment to increasing activity in the far north as well as investing in Arctic maritime capabilities. In turn, Canada's *ONSF* can be interpreted as a co-commitment to the two governments' shared interest in Arctic defence.

The accepted long-term threat in the Arctic stems from climate change and its subsequent effects on water levels, ice formation, ecology, and Arctic residents, which necessitates coordinated strategic planning. In the short term, a state-based military invasion or other type of hard security matter is hypothetically possible, though the realistic foreign threats that are developing in the region pertain to resource exploitation, illegal fishing, unauthorized commercial shipping, pollution, organized crime, and threats to local animals and vegetation. Increased activity also creates a greater need for search and rescue capabilities that are already

strained. These more-immediate threats are best addressed by authorities other than military and best managed by policies outside of the realm of defence.

The main issues in the Arctic that are discussed in the *ANPF* are creating healthy communities, improve infrastructure, protect the natural environment, and reconciliation. These are not, nor are they argued by policy documents, to be issues that stem from a lack of law enforcement, shows of sovereignty, foreign interest, commercial shipping, tourism, or other internationally based concerns which *ONSF* seeks to help address. This is not to discredit the validity, relevance, or significance of either policy. Both serve an important function in supporting the Canadian Arctic; however, they address different domains of domestic and international policy. Conversely, the assertion of sovereignty does not necessarily have to be entirely rooted in the military. Domestic policies towards indigenous reconciliation and the devolution of territorial governance lend themselves to Inuit Governor General Mary Simon's claim that "sovereignty begins at home," a sentiment that was overlooked in the initial process of securitization that presented a narrow focus on military-led solutions (Simon 2009).

Implications on Future Research

While the speech acts by Harper raised the profile of Arctic politics, it did not convince key bureaucratic departments such as the CAF and National Defence to follow a hard security agenda in the region. National Defence expressed vague concerns about hard security issues in the Arctic in *Canada First*, which is a notable departure from previous defence policies that hardly discuss Arctic security. However, the language of the defence policy is a diluted version of Harper's speeches, with a much softer tone that frames the military as a supporting actor in the far North.

This presents an important conclusion for the study of securitization in a democratic context. The act of securitization is limited by the need to resonate laterally with interdepartmental stakeholders across the government in addition to abiding by the conventional conception of securitization as top-down process. Arctic securitization seemed to initially be largely accepted by public media with even some interest expressed by the academic community. However, the Department of National Defence only demonstrated a partial buy-in to a hard security narrative without the clear presentation of a verifiable threat or "crisis" event at the time of the speech acts. The increased profile of the Arctic led to a whole-of-government approach that placed relatively more weight on domestic matter addressed by other agencies.

Regarding path dependence, policy publications since Harper's series of speech acts show that the securitization process perpetuated some false narrative about the Arctic. The are several components to this argument. One, the securitization pretense of hard security concerns reinforced the perception of the Arctic as the last frontier, at least in the Canadian context. Frontier rhetoric was espoused under both the Harper and Trudeau governments when implying that the current sovereignty status of the Arctic is not well established. This narrows the conception of sovereignty to a "boots on the ground" military-led mentality, discounting the role Indigenous groups play in exercising Canadian sovereignty in the far north. Despite the Trudeau government's expressed commitment to reconciliation and continuing the process of a devolution of government in the territories, this type of frontier rhetoric persists. For example, the *ANPF* mentions the effects of climate change as "putting the rich wealth of northern natural resources within reach," and *ONSF's* claim that a military-led "vigorous assertion" of sovereignty is needed. This is indictive of the persistence of paradigms of thought, where the transformation of Arctic policy demonstrates the inertia of colonialism and traditional notions of security.

This is despite much of the literature presenting a strong legal case for *de jure* sovereignty rooted in precedent and the historical presence of the Inuit. Insecurities are perpetuated by assertive claims over the NWP that repeat a need to "protect," "assert," "defend," and "exercise" sovereignty. Reflections on Arctic and defence policies present the need to do more, rather than presenting what has and is being done to solidify sovereignty claims. For Canada, Arctic sovereignty is presented as an infinite goal post that is always admired, to some extent pursued, but never achieved.

Beyond the domestic notion of the Arctic as a frontier, the circumpolar north is a strong example of multilateral coordination and regional governance. The Arctic Council is renowned for its multi-stakeholder partnerships, forums for non-state actors, and rotating agenda-setting chairmanship. However, this culminates in a Canadian policy that struggles to balance the international and domestic components of the Arctic. The many domestic socioeconomic issues in Canada's far north bleed into circumpolar policy, sometimes at the frustration of other states.

A key area for future research is to examine how Canada manages the dual nature of Arctic policy. The federal government has ongoing commitments to address systemic issues in the far north and a need to address non-traditional security concerns within a domestic context as well as promote indigenous reconciliation and the devolution of territorial governance. This challenge is further complicated by the recent resurgence of great power politics and geopolitical competition in the Arctic.

Future research will have the opportunity to observe whether *ONSF* breaks the historical pattern of a stifled military response to events in the Arctic. The next decade represents a critical turning point in Arctic politics where Canada may demonstrate an actionable response to address growing hard security concerns. Or Canada may follow the historic pattern of limited military

activity in the region, perhaps choosing to follow a US-orchestrated approach to security in the North American Arctic.

Conclusion

This thesis employed the concept of securitization theory under a path dependence model to explain change and continuity in Canada's Arctic policy under the Stephen Harper and Justin Trudeau governments. The historical analysis of Arctic and defence policies exhibits a pattern of government anxieties about Canada's claim to sovereignty over the Arctic Archipelago and its surrounding waters. When foreign states demonstrate a perceived challenge to Canada's sovereignty claim, typically in the form of surprise transits into Canada's EEZ or through the NWP, it provokes a government response that emphasises the need for the military to assert Canada's sovereignty over the region. These policy formulations do not develop into significant military action however, due to an aversion to significant spending in the remote and sparsely populated far north. The pattern continues, characterized by a minimalist approach to traditional security until the next perceived crisis.

Change occurred through securitization by the Harper government, which sought to break this pattern by presenting an existential threat to Canada's sovereign claim over the region. This was exaggerated to present an existential threat to a part of Canada's identity as an Arctic nation. Harper's rhetoric in a series of speeches between 2006 and 2007 demanded a significant increase in support for the CAF, investments in Arctic capabilities, and a sustainable increased presence of military personnel and assets across the region. This amplified concerns about a potential hard security threat in the Arctic in hopes of promoting significant military action. Unlike several of the past calls for more military activity in the far north, Harper's speech acts were a proactive step in increasing the profile of the Arctic in the absence of a new perceived crisis. This is a

notable factor in explaining why National Defence, a key stakeholder, did not demonstrate a full commitment to the hard security concerns espoused in the speech acts. Harper's decision to frame an Arctic threat as a hard security issue instead of a verifiable non-traditional threat stems from a historic paradigm of hard security considerations dominating the Arctic security discourse and the desire to communicate a message that resonated with the southern-majority population.

The 2008 defence policy, *Canada First,* presented a compromise. It presented some of Harper's language with the need to "defend" Canadian sovereignty rather than simply "assert," but adapted the securitization approach to emphasis human and environmental security. It framed the CAF as a support agency to facilitate other agencies' abilities to address more-pressing non-traditional security concerns. The act of securitization succussed in fulfilling Harper's 2005-06 campaign promise to draw more attention to the Arctic. However, attention from multiple government agencies led to the develop of whole-of-government approach that gave less credence to hard security issues than what was presented in the speech acts.

Arctic policy under Trudeau initially continued the emphasis on non-traditional security concerns within the sphere of domestic politics. This was consistent with the Liberal Party's 2015 campaign promises to support Indigenous, and by extension, Arctic communities. However, a critical juncture emerged after the release of the Trudeau government's first defence policy with the rise of China as an assertive non-Arctic circumpolar actor and re-emergence of Russia as a geopolitical adversary. The 2024 defence policy, *Our North, Strong, and Free,* presents a dramatic refocus on hard security, with rhetoric that is akin to the policy goals articulated in Harper's speeches. The defence policy provides an unprecedent focus on Arctic security. It benefits from the domestic political context that emerged from securitization, which dramatically increased the political salience of the Arctic within Canadian political discourse.

The challenge for Canada's future is to maintain policies of human and environmental security and improve living standards for Arctic and northern residents, while addressing emerging concerns about Russia and China in the region. The history of Arctic policies demonstrates a pattern of an external shock prompting a call for military action, a stifled response, then a new external event reigniting old anxieties about sovereignty. Canada's latest approach to Arctic security presents an opportunity to break this pattern, thanks in part to securitization increasing Canada's appetite for Arctic activity and the new external threat posed by China and Russia.

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