11
Arctic Security for a Big Small Country

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11.1. Introduction

What does 'Arctic security' mean for a nation state with lots of geography, but not many people? To be sure, superpowers still rule the world or dream of doing so. Throughout the Cold War, the 'old' superpowers, Russia and the United States, scoped the great white spaces of Arctic lands and waters as potential battlegrounds. Near the end of the Cold War, on 1 October 1987 at Murmansk, Mikhail Gorbachev proposed that the Arctic become a 'zone of peace' and a new theatre of cooperation, but we are not there yet.[1] The old superpowers still aim enough nuclear weapons at each other to incinerate the planet at the press of a button. And the 21st century now catches the ascendant powers: China, India and others casting covetous eyes over the Arctic's lands, resources and waters.

So, how might an Arctic nation with bountiful natural wealth but limited human resources respond not just to the challenges of climate change, cyber warfare and globalisation but also considerable threats to its economic, social and environmental security from distant powers? One answer might be a 'bottom up', 'North First' or communitarian approach to security.

11.2. Old Crow

In *Hunting the Northern Character*, I wrote about a memorable 2006 conversation I had with a Canadian Senator. The Senator had travelled from Ottawa to visit Old Crow, the home of the Vuntut Gwitchin First Nation (People of the Lakes), the northernmost First Nation in Canada's Yukon

Territory. In a word, the Senator was astonished by what he saw. Rather than the poverty, poor housing and dysfunction evident on many 'Indian reserves' in southern Canada, he witnessed in Old Crow a bustling, prospering community, with new houses under construction and new jobs in the regional airline in which the Vuntut Gwitchin were now part owners.

The source of the economic and social health in this community resulted from its land claims treaty negotiated with the federal and territorial governments and signed in 1993, which returned 7,744 square kilometres of land to Vuntut Gwitchin ownership and CA$19.2 million 'compensation', much of it held in trust for future generations.[2]

Gazing upon the community's new houses and airline jobs, the Senator wondered aloud how Canada could justify that expenditure. Think of it as an investment, I responded. Look west to Alaska. The US has something like 20,000 armed forces in the state. At that time, Canada had but two soldiers based in the territory. The Vuntut Gwitchin Treaty and the viable community it fostered, I argued, represented a substantial investment in Canada's Arctic sovereignty and security. At that point, I had not heard public policy articulated exactly that way, but validation of my view came in a 2015 EKOS Research Associates survey finding that 78 per cent of respondents in the Canadian North and 69 per cent of respondents in the Canadian South – 81 per cent and 71 per cent respectively in 2010 – thought that the 'best way to protect [Canada's] national interests in the Arctic is to have [Canadians] living there'.[3]

11.3. Difficult Choices

As every politician knows, governing means making choices between: sovereignty and security; economic and social security; also, arms acquisitions and environmental protection. Has Canada sometimes traded away some of its sovereignty? Historian Desmond Morton has written that, by joining various alliances, the country did exactly that.[4] Canadians quickly air their anxieties about the country's 'sovereignty', such as when, in 1969, the oil tanker *SS Manhattan* sailed through the Northwest Passage, which Canada sees as its 'internal waters', and the US regards as 'international strait'. Although Canadian nationalists saw this as an act of American 'imperialism', Canada and the United States did not go to war over the issue. Rather, Ottawa and Washington simply agreed to disagree. Regardless, in 1970, the federal government asserted Canadian sovereignty with the Arctic Waters Pollution Prevention Act.

After US Coast Guard icebreaker *Polar Sea* navigated the Passage once more in 1985, Canada drew straight baselines around the Arctic Archipelago, effectively redefining its Arctic boundaries. For all that, an EKOS poll showed that one in four Canadians imagined that the country had military bases all along the Northwest Passage.[5] During the Cold War, only American and Russian submarines actually cruised through Canada's 'internal waters'.

More so, can any 'middle power' afford both a mighty military machine and a government-funded health care system? The United States remains the most heavily armed nation in the world. By contrast, Canada's single-payer health care system is its most expensive and popular social programme. Canada's healthcare system was estimated to cost CA$253.5 billion in 2018; the country spends one tenth of that on defence.[6]

In truth, the eight Arctic states all face tough choices about security expenditures. Canadians and Americans agree on the urgent need for Arctic Ocean ports and new icebreakers, but neither Parliament nor Congress have proved ready to appropriate the necessary sums. A single icebreaker may cost over US$1 billion, and southern politicians will always have other priorities.

11.4. Different Perspectives on Security

Northerners have long been aware that 'security' may mean different things to different folk. At a US and Canada Military Law Training session at a Seattle Coast Guard base, in September 2015, I suggested that, for the Canadian Arctic, three broadly different perspectives colour security debates among parliamentarians, political scientists and Northern thinkers.

a. For conservatives, security must be bought with armaments and military infrastructure. Armed might increases a nation's command and control of its territory. Rob Huebert, an articulate exponent of this view, writes: 'Within Canada, Arctic sovereignty can be understood in the context of the Canadian government's ability to *control* what happens in the area that it defines as its Arctic region.'[7] However, as every caribou hunter and Arctic mariner knows, *control* is an illusion. No matter how massive a country's military spending, that cannot stop climate change or prevent extreme weather events. Besides, Arctic security means much more than Arctic sovereignty.[8]

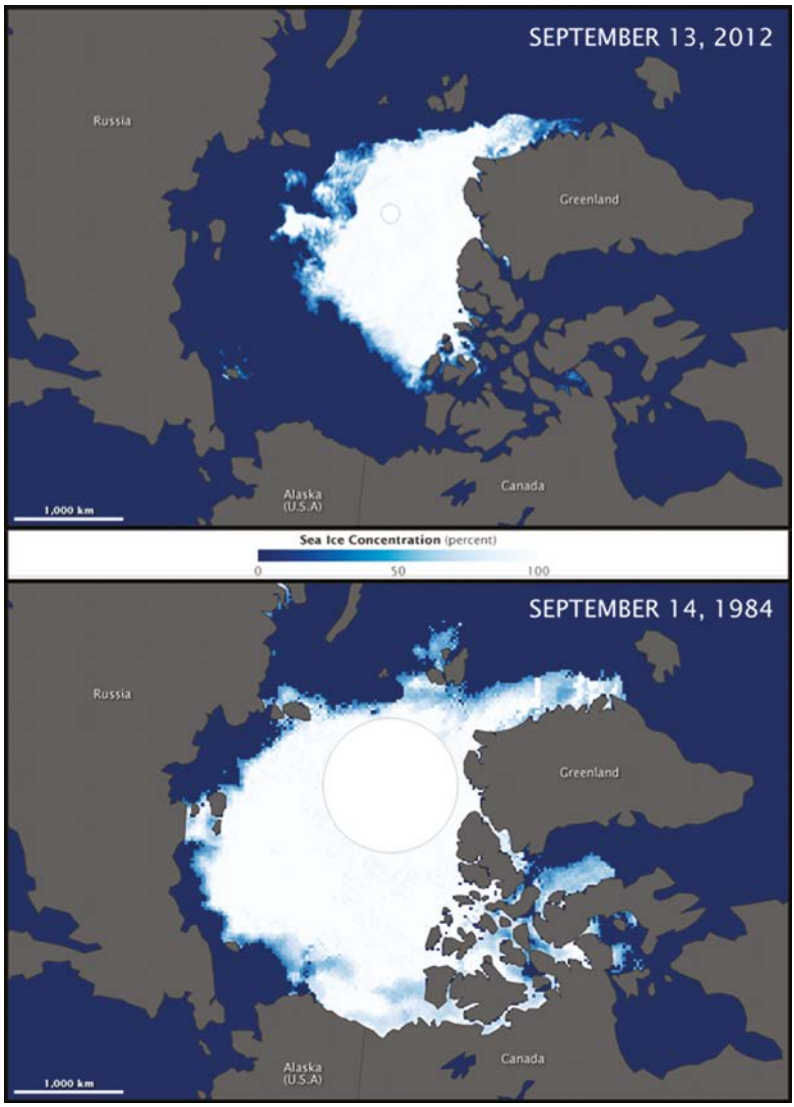

Fig. 11.1 NASA Earth Observatory maps comparing minimum extent of Arctic sea ice from 2012 (top) and 1984 (bottom). Assembled from NASA Earth Observatory images by Jesse Allen, using data from the Advanced Microwave Scanning Radiometer 2 AMSR-2 sensor on the Global Change Observation Mission 1st-Water (GCOM-W1) satellite, 2012. Retrieved from http://earthobservatory.nasa.gov/IOTD/view.php?id=79256 via Wikimedia Commons.

To protect against external threats, about half of Canadians do agree that their country must build a more muscular military presence in the Arctic.[9] At the same time, everybody knows that fighter jets screaming over the tundra or warships calling at all the world's ports, but never to the non-existent ports of Arctic North America, do not make northerners feel secure. Another uncomfortable truth for Canada is that, for decades, both conservative and liberal governments loudly announced military procurement decisions, then followed with missed deadlines, endless delays and quiet cancellations.

b. Former Liberal foreign minister Lloyd Axworthy promoted a concept called 'human security'. For liberals, 'human security' means, among other things, food, housing and individual human rights. Indeed, Canadian public opinion research showed that citizens saw threats to Arctic security coming not from missiles or bombers, but climate change, environmental degradation and extreme poverty.[10] In an address to the United Nations, Axworthy argued: '… security should be measured in terms of ultimate outcome for individuals and peoples…'[11]

One problem with the liberal idea is that it focuses on the *individual*, who may not be a good reference point for Arctic security. For Hollywood, the lone man with a gun represents the iconic figure of the Western frontier, but in Jack London's 'To Build a Fire', the Cheechako walking down the Yukon River at fifty degrees below zero – without a companion – freezes to death. Perhaps neither the *state* nor the *individual* stand as a referent point for Arctic security.

As Franklyn Griffiths, Canada's pre-eminent Arctic scholar, explains:

> 'I suggest we take the referent object for life and quality of life in the Arctic to be neither the state, nor the individual, nor civil society, but the *community*, typically the remote small indigenous community which is embedded in the natural environment. Characterising the referent object, the term "community" also sums up the many and varied purposes of collective action for the good in Arctic conditions. It connotes order without law. This is order that's based on shared norms or standards of behaviour that govern human relations and, especially in an Arctic setting, human relations with the world of nature.'[12]

c. From this kind of 'social democrat' perspective, security starts with viable cooperative communities as the cornerstone. As Gorbachev declared on 1 October 1987: 'The community and interrelationship of the interests of our entire world is felt in the northern part of the globe, in the Arctic, perhaps more than anywhere else.'[13] A former conservative prime minister, Stephen Harper, used to say of the Arctic that Canada must 'use it or lose it', but in the Far North, there exist enduring human communities that have been 'using it' since time immemorial. Indeed, the greatest threat of Canada 'losing' its Arctic might arise not from hostile nuclear submarines or long-range bombers, but from the social, climatic and economic challenges that keep those living there from fully benefiting from Canadian citizenship.[14]

Securing the world's emerging Arctic 'community of communities' might sound like an idealist's dream, but survey research suggests that building towards such a goal would appeal not only to Canadians, but to other Arctic residents as well.[15] By itself, the Canadian military could not defeat the army of any major power. Taking a multidimensional approach to securing the Canadian Arctic and the wider Arctic community is more realistic than making empty promises of military expansion, which offer only fantasies of command and control.

Harking back to the conversation with the Senator in Old Crow, treaty negotiations have contributed mightily to Arctic sovereignty and security in both Canada and the United States. Following the Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act (ANCSA) of 1971, indigenous Alaska communities collectively recaptured 180,000 square kilometres of Alaska lands, making them the largest private landowners in the state, and almost US$1 billion in compensation. Following ANCSA, Canada chose to negotiate 20 treaties with northern indigenous peoples. For indigenous people, these treaty lands and self-government agreements represented redress for a century of colonisation. For Canada, these treaties stand as enduring expressions of the nation state's sovereignty and security. Of necessity, given the political complexities of our time, a successful Arctic security strategy would combine elements of all three perspectives described above.

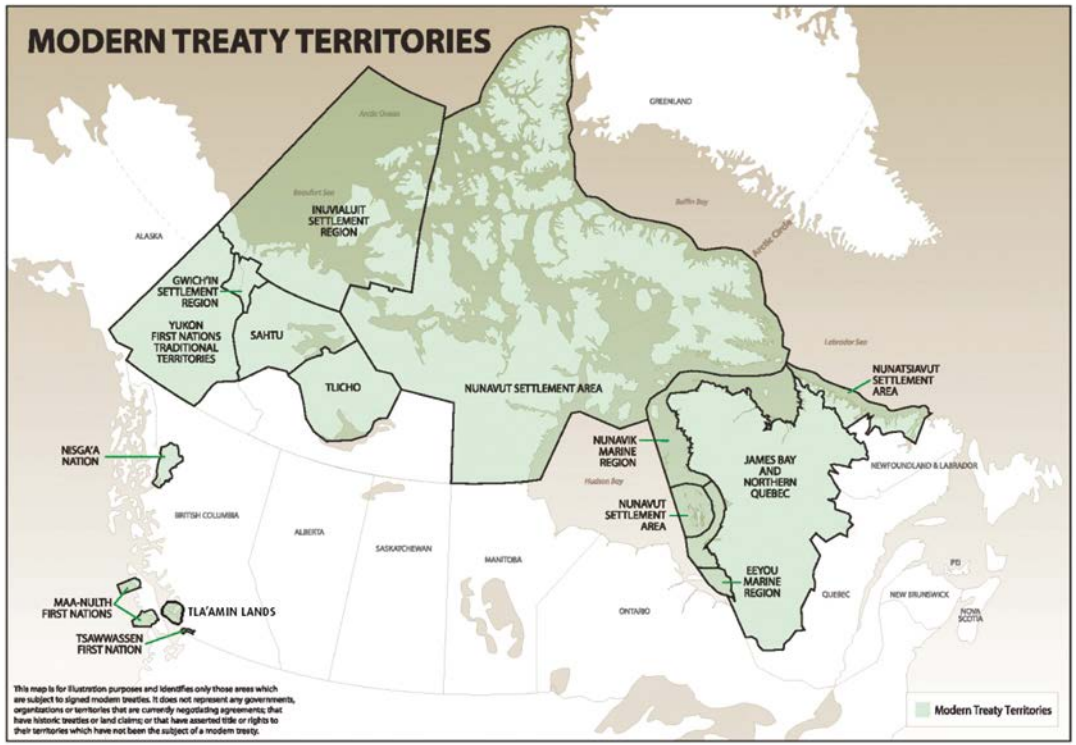

Fig. 11.2 Modern Treaties Territories Map.

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11.5. Securing the Arctic Community

At the North American Arctic Maritime and Environmental Security Workshop in Anchorage in September 2018, I suggested that a strategic security architecture for a big country with a small population then might need four dimensions: a deep conception of security; wide cooperation around the Arctic region; longitudinal, two-way collaboration between Arctic villages, regional and national governments, and international entities such as the Arctic Council, International Maritime Organization (IMO Polar Code), NATO, NORAD, SAR treaty and the United Nation Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS); plus investment over time in civilian and military infrastructure.

a. Deep Conception of Security: A deep conception of 'security' would encompass everything from military to individual to community security, including, of course, economic, social and environmental aspects. Without potable water, individuals suffer. Without food security, a community suffers. Without habitable dwellings, Arctic residents shiver in the dark. Without income security, homeless northerners bed down beneath ATMs. Absent climate change mitigation, the whole world suffers. Food, water, housing, environmental, economic and social security all matter, especially in the Arctic. In their survey sample drawn from the Canadian North, EKOS found that, when asked to rate five different aspects of Arctic security, nine in 10 respondents identified environmental and social security as being the most important; two thirds regarded economic security and cultural and language security as such; while 45 per cent placed importance on national security.[16] This illustrated that to many Canadians, particularly those in the North, the conception of security includes domestic factors (cultural, social and environmental security) in addition to national security.[17]

b. Wide Cooperation: On-the-ground cooperation among villages, cities and regions, also nation-states, is also a fundamental requirement for Arctic security. Norwegian scholar Andreas Østhagen notes that the European Union has responded to Washington's demands for increased EU defence spending by improving regional cooperation, pooling of resources and the sharing of talent. Østhagen thinks that collaboration and cooperation may be a financial necessity, even for superpowers.[18] Even now, long after the Cold War, Swedish diplomat and security expert Rolf Ekéus thinks we cannot achieve security in the Arctic without the cooperation of both Russia and the

United States, which at the Bering Strait are separated by very few kilometres.[19] In any case, today's threats to Arctic security are economic and environmental, and more civilian than military.

c. Longitudinal Coordination: Longitudinal coordination between communities, regions and nations counts as a vital third dimension. Achieving Arctic scale security depends on effective, longitudinal coordination between chiefs or governments of communities, legislators of sub-national entities, federal governments or nation-states, and international bodies like the Arctic Council, the IMO and UNCLOS. Such coordination can be achieved only through two-way communication, not top-down, south-to-north diktats from national capitals. It will also require functioning relationships at every level, including with the private and not-for-profit sectors.

Securing the Arctic will also require multi-party coordination at all levels, from community to region to nation, as well as long-term infrastructure investment plans, such as the most successful private operators make. In the polar regions, coordination and communication between the public and the private sectors is critical. Sometimes, as in the following example, it can be a matter of life and death.

In 2001, Dr Ronald Shemenski, the only physician among 50 researchers working at the Amundsen Scott–South Pole

Fig. 11.3 A Kenn Borek Twin Otter aircraft flies over Antarctica.

Photograph by Christopher Michel, 2013. Retrieved from Wikimedia Commons.

Research Station, suffered a potentially life-threatening gall bladder attack. To retrieve the 59-year-old doctor, an eight-seat Twin Otter plane fitted with skis for landing gear flew from the Rothera Research Station on the Antarctic Peninsula, the first successful evacuation at the South Pole during the cold and dark polar winter. Kenn Borek Air, a Canadian company led the mid-winter rescue flight.

d. Investment over time: Beyond isolation, many Arctic communities suffer both economic distress and environmental damage, as well as food, health and housing deficits. Security for such communities may only be achieved with long-term investments in airports, ports, roads, schools and other such multiple-use infrastructure. The sustainability of any such investment plan will need firm commitments from chiefs, mayors, legislators, governors and federal officials towards building the necessary consensus on infrastructure investments. Given Canada's sorry history of military procurements, common sense might suggest forging all-party, long-term plans for multi-use (civilian, corporate and military) infrastructure in the Arctic for the nation.

The best demonstration of Canadian sovereignty would be to ensure that residents of our North are able to continue living in their communities. As the EKOS study showed, some respondents, noting the high costs and lack of access to services in the North, argued that 'the remoteness of northern communities should not result in inferior services and quality of life compared to that enjoyed by other Canadians. In the words of one focus group participant, "We pay taxes just like everybody else".'[20] By fighting housing shortages, low educational attainment and drug and alcohol abuse, Canada's Arctic sovereignty can be greatly strengthened. We can reinforce our national relationships with the Arctic by investing in the region's economic and social foundations, by fully implementing nation-building land-claim settlements with indigenous peoples and by investing in military hardware and multi-use infrastructure. The Canadian Department of National Defence (DND)'s Defence Science Advisory Board (DSAB) Report 1001 actually recommended a 'northern first' policy for procurement for Arctic operations (building multi-purpose infrastructure for military operations, resource developers and communities).[21]

The 'North First' approach of the Defence Science Advisory Board makes a lot of sense, especially if, together, the federal parties in Parliament, after consulting with indigenous communities and territorial

governments, could be persuaded to adopt a long-term plan to build multi-purpose infrastructure, ports and runways, and to base icebreakers and rescue aircraft in the North. On the cornerstone of community, Canada could build Arctic security using the tools of cooperation, coordination and long-term investment.

11.6. Conclusion: A Security Framework

To sum up, a security framework for a big country with a small population would be founded on a *deep definition* of *security*; *wide cooperation* between villages, towns and regions; *longitudinal (two-way) coordination* between villages, cities, states and territories, nations and international entities; and *long-term investments* in multi-use infrastructure.

To be clear, Canada's Arctic sovereignty and security could be compromised by our Arctic citizens not having access to clean drinking water, second-rate schools, low or melting ice cover and permafrost that upset communities and disrupt the migratory patterns of the fish and game on which northerners rely. And it can be undermined by high unemployment rates that force many young northerners to move south to find work. Poverty is an obvious source of insecurity.

During his last Arctic tour, Conservative Prime Minister Stephen Harper described his Arctic mission as nation-building. 'This is the frontier. This is the place that defines our country', he said.[22] 'Our country

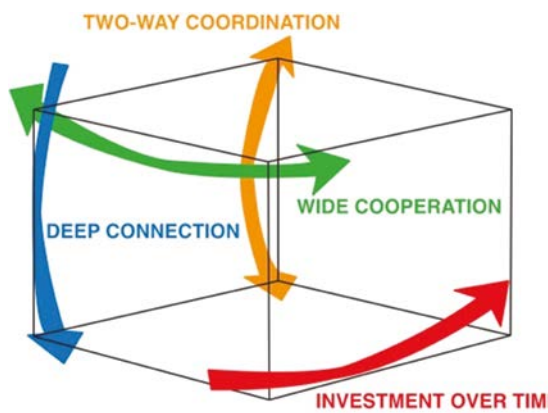

Fig. 11.4 An effective Arctic security framework should involve two-way coordination, deep connection, wide cooperation and long-term investments. Source: Author

is widely recognised as one that broadly defines its security by seeking to promote environmental, cultural and food security at home in Canada and throughout the world. This commitment should hold true in every part of the country – from sea to sea to sea.'[23] The latter commitment most Canadians might well embrace. But as Thomas Berger famously pointed out in *Northern Frontier, Northern Homeland*, the report of his Mackenzie Valley Pipeline Inquiry, 'The North is a *frontier*, but it is a *homeland* too.'[24]

Notes

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5 EKOS, 'Rethinking the Top of the World: Arctic Public Opinion Survey', 6.
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7 Rob Huebert, 'Canadian Arctic Sovereignty and Security in a Transforming Circumpolar Word', *Canada and the Changing Arctic: Sovereignty, Security, and Stewardship*, Franklyn Griffiths, Rob Huebert, and P. Whitney Lackenbauer (Waterloo, Ontario: Wilfred Laurier University Press, 2011), 19.
8 Tony Penikett, 'Arctic Security Means More Than Arctic Sovereignty', *The Globe and Mail*, published 26 January 2011, updated 3 March 2018, https://www.theglobeandmail.com/opinion/arctic-security-means-more-than-arctic-sovereignty/article563433/.
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10 EKOS, 'Rethinking the Top of the World: Arctic Public Opinion Survey'.
11 Lloyd Axworthy, Address to the 51st General Assembly in September 1996 and in an address of April 1997. Quoted in Franklyn Griffiths, 'Not That Good a Fit? "Human Security" and the Arctic', in *Arctic Security in the Twenty-First Century: Conference Report* ed. Jayantha Dhanapala, John Harriss, and Jennifer Simons (Vancouver: Simon Fraser University, School for International Studies, 2008), 56.
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13 Gorbachev, 'The Speech in Murmansk'.
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15 Originally a reference to Canada by Prime Minister Joe Clark in 1979, as cited in *Who Speaks for Canada?: Words That Shape a Country,* ed. D. Morton and M. Weinfield (1998).
16 EKOS, 'Rethinking the Top of the World: Arctic Public Opinion Survey', 36.
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18 Andreas Østhagen, 'Coastguards in peril: a study of Arctic defence collaboration', *Defence Studies* 15 (2015): 143–60.
19 Rolf Ekéus, 'Military Security in the Arctic', *Arctic Security in the 21st Century: Conference Report* (Vancouver: Simon Fraser University School for International Studies, April 2008): 38.
20 EKOS, 'Rethinking the Top of the World: Arctic Public Opinion Survey', 24.
21 Defence of National Defence, Defence Science Advisory Board, DSAB Report 1001: *Defining a Comprehensive Approach*

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23 Tony Penikett, 'Arctic Security Means More Than Arctic Sovereignty'.

24 Thomas R. Berger, *Northern Frontier, Northern Homeland: The Report of the Mackenzie Valley Pipeline Inquiry: Volume 1* (Ottawa: Supply and Services Canada, 1977) vii.