

**Adam Lajeunesse, PhD**  
**Postdoctoral Fellow, St. Jerome's University**

Over the past decade the CAF has embarked on a concerted effort to renew and rebuild its Arctic capabilities, after having allowed most of its northern combat and survival skills to atrophy during the 1990s. As is the case in all things Arctic, progress has been slow and expensive. Yet, the need for these capabilities is unquestioned. A changing Arctic environment, coupled with new destinational and cruise shipping, and the prospect of long term resource development promises to bring new activity and new dangers to the region. As such, the CAF's role in Arctic security will only increase in scope and importance.

This role has been commonly misunderstood. The general nature of the CAF's core objectives in the Arctic, namely providing security and defending sovereignty, has given rise to confusion within the general public about what exactly the military has been tasked with and what constitutes success. Too often, Arctic security has been taken to mean conventional military security while the defence of sovereignty has been taken to mean little more than a physical and visible CAF presence.

In fact, there are no immediate or foreseeable military threats in the Arctic and the prospect of the CAF being called upon to engage in kinetic operations is virtually zero. The most likely future threats are all unconventional in nature – such as disaster relief, pollution prevention, constabulary action, and other similar and related duties. These threats are properly fitted into the categories of safety and security, rather than defence, and the CAF is not the mandated lead in responding to such threats. Still, by virtue of its assets, resources, and capabilities, it will provide crucial support to other government departments and agencies to enable those groups to exercise their own responsibilities and mandates in the North.

The CAF's sovereignty responsibilities have, likewise, been commonly misconstrued as an effort to strengthen Canada's legal position by demonstrating 'presence.' In fact, defending sovereignty consists of exercising effective control over the Arctic in response to the country's real needs and interests in Canadian territory and internal waters. From a practical legal perspective, this means demonstrating that the waters of the archipelago are historic internal waters, a status that requires both foreign acceptance of Canada's position, and the exclusive and effective exercise of Canadian jurisdiction.

Recognition of Canadian sovereignty is best displayed by foreign operators complying with Canadian laws and regulations in Canadian waters. This, in turn, is something that the CAF encourages by maintaining enforcement capabilities tailored to supporting constabulary operations in the Arctic waters, by assisting foreign and domestic operators, and working with other departments and agencies to facilitate the application of Canadian jurisdiction across the region.

Within this framework for understanding sovereignty and security, the CAF's Arctic capabilities should not be judged primarily on its force levels or the progress of its major Arctic platforms and infrastructure projects – which are relevant only in so far as they enable the Forces to accomplish core responsibilities. Instead, capacity should be defined and measured by the ability to respond to the most likely and realistic threats and challenges. This implies the need for situational awareness, the ability to deploy and

maintain appropriate mission specific teams adaptable to a variety of situations, smooth integration into joint operations, and the ability to respond quickly and decisively with appropriate force across the Canadian Arctic. These missions and requirements receive less public attention than large-scale deployments or major procurement programs but they are at the heart of the military's modern approach to Arctic sovereignty and security.

In summation, the CAF does not need an enhanced combat capability in the Arctic. There is no one to fight. It does not need a large permanent presence. There would be little for those troops to do. The optics of a large presence, while politically appealing, has little impact on Canada's sovereignty position. Sovereignty is strengthened by demonstrating a genuine ability to operate in and control the Arctic. Security is measured by the Forces' ability to respond to those threats present today and most likely to emerge in the foreseeable future. These considerations should continue to guide CAF doctrine, training, and procurement in the North.