

Biden-Putin's Arctic cooperation gives Canada an opportunity

By Adele Buckley

When the American and Russian Presidents met in June for their summit, the Arctic represented a rare point of common ground. Arctic watchers noted Biden's intent that "the Arctic remains a region of cooperation", and Putin's equally interesting desire for the Arctic to continue as "a zone of understanding". As an Arctic nation, Canada could take this opportunity to support Arctic cooperation and understanding by a modest increment in its Arctic policy. In ongoing support of nuclear arms control and disarmament, Canada should have an aspirational statement that it supports a goal of an Arctic region free of nuclear weapons. This is fully in line with existing Canadian policy. This would not be a case of breaking new ground in nuclear disarmament diplomacy since Denmark (Greenland), under the guidance of then foreign policy minister Holger Neilsen, has included this aspirational position in their Arctic policy since 2012.

Today there is increased tension created by Russia's remarkable renewal and increase of military bases and operations in the Arctic and by NATO's ever-larger military exercises, annually, in the North Atlantic and extending into the Barents Sea. The Arctic region that has for decades been recognized as non-militarized is now heading toward a state that can only be deemed as militarized.

Canada's position, 2019 - Global Affairs Canada has produced Arctic and Northern Policy Framework which has an extensive chapter "Safety, security, and defence". Canada plans to deploy several new Arctic-capable surface vessels to aid in the defence of Arctic waters in cooperation with its allies in NATO (a nuclear weapons alliance). Arctic waters are host to submarines known to be equipped with multiple nuclear missiles. Both Russia and the United States continue to upgrade and renew their submarine fleets. Other nuclear weapon states, Britain, France, China will, in future, send their submarines to Arctic waters. Submarines will be in the central Arctic Ocean, and sooner or later will find it advantageous to enter Canada's Exclusive Economic Zones (per United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS)). Avoiding all mention of this situation in Canada's policy document is a major shortcoming. One might also wonder how the participant nations of the Search and Rescue Agreement would handle a submarine accident.

Strong, Secure and Engaged is a policy statement of the Canadian Department of National Defence. The Arctic section rates half a page, with emphasis on cooperation within the Arctic Council, an admirable organization that intentionally does not address military matters.

The appointment of Mary Simon as Canada's new Governor General raises hope that all of Canada will raise its awareness of Arctic issues and that the Government of Canada will expend resources to support its Arctic security policy. Mary Simon was actively involved in the Inuit Circumpolar Council (ICC) from 1980 to 1994 and served as President from 1986 to 1992. ICC

has member countries Canada, United States, Denmark (Greenland) and Russia (Inuit of the Chukotka Peninsula). Arctic peoples have suffered the burden of a spectrum of nuclear operations, from WWII and continuing through the Cold War period. **Resolution on a Nuclear Free Zone in the Arctic [adopted] 1983** is the ICC Resolution demanding the absence of nuclear materials from the Arctic. While it is still in force, this forceful resolution has now fallen into obscurity. ICC published the Inuit Arctic Policy, 2009 and also issued a multi-page excerpt relating to Arctic Security, stating full support for the disarmament goals of the United Nations General Assembly and re-iterating the requirement for absence of nuclear weapons and nuclear weapons testing.

Continuing to draw attention to the Arctic and the Inuit people, Canada can make a modest contribution to Arctic cooperation through an aspirational statement, similar to Denmark's supporting the future attainment of a nuclear-weapon-free Arctic. Note that of the four ICC member countries, Canada and Denmark, members of NATO, are nuclear-weapons-free and have the opportunity to step forward, however lightly, toward nuclear disarmament.

Adele Buckley is a physicist, aerospace engineer, and environmental scientist. Ms. Buckley says Canada can make a modest contribution to Arctic cooperation through an aspirational statement supporting the future attainment of a nuclear-weapon-free Arctic.

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