Notes

We are a northern country: Stephen Harper and the Canadian Arctic

Klaus Dodds
Department of Geography, Royal Holloway, University of London, Egham, Surrey TW20 0EX (K.Dodds@rhul.ac.uk)

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ABSTRACT. Two Canadian Speeches from the Throne (2007, 2010) form the centrepiece of this brief analysis of Stephen Harper and his government's approach towards the Arctic. In essence, it is argued that a form of actionism prevails; a preference for being seen to be taking action in the face of apparent uncertainly regarding the Arctic and the activities of other stakeholders. Unpinned by what Michael Billig termed 'habit of language', this note considers how Prime Minister Harper mobilises domestic political support for this proposals. However, it is a risky strategy. As the 2010 meeting of the five Arctic Ocean coastal states revealed, other stakeholders such as the United States in the form of Secretary of State Hillary Clinton publicly rebuked Canada for attempting to limit participation in talks about the future of the Arctic.

Introduction

In the 'Speech from the Throne' in March 2010, the Harper government reiterated *inter alia* the importance of the Arctic for Canada and Canadian citizens (Canada 2010). The 'Speech from the Throne' (hereafter 'speech') is a publicly televised event in which the Governor-General (the Queen's representative) reads a prepared speech (composed in English and French) to parliament. It outlines, as with the British context, the government's agenda for the coming parliamentary session. The speech came in the midst of a controversial moment in recent Canadian political history following the prime minister's decision to prorogue parliament on 30 December 2009. This meant, in effect, that parliamentary business was suspended until the aftermath of the Vancouver Winter Olympics. Ostensibly the government claimed that the move was designed to allow for further consultation over its economic action plan post-recession. However, opposition parties had complained that the real reason behind the move was because of the increasingly embarrassing revelations featuring Afghan detainees and their torture by the Afghan National Army after being captured earlier by Canadian forces (CBC 2010).

Four years after his election in 2006, it is timely to consider both the significance of the 2010 speech, and the specific context of the Canadian Arctic. Prime Minister Harper has arguably made the 'north' a central plank of his government's policies and public speeches. In Michael Billig's terms, Harper epitomises the manner in which 'habits of language', routinely help to 'flag' nationalism in a banal, everyday manner (Billig 1995: 93–94). Apart from using words like 'Arctic' and 'north', Harper also uses, more importantly perhaps, words like 'our' and 'we'. While there is evidence of recent administrations directing a larger Arctic focus (for example the 2005 International Policy Statement), Harper has invested a good deal of policy interest and nationalist argumentation, as witnessed by the 2007 *Northern Strategy*. Speaking in suitably northerly locations such as Iqaluit and Yellowknife, Harper has affirmed time and time again three major themes: the pressing importance of Canadian sovereignty, the economic value of the Arctic, and the symbolic significance of the north to Canadian national identity. On sovereignty, for example, he has, depending on one's point of view, been assertive and dogmatic. Reminding an audience in British Columbia in July 2007, he remarked:

> During the last election campaign, the Conservative Party made it clear that Canada must do more to defend Canada's Arctic sovereignty.
> Because the world is changing.
> The ongoing discovery of the North's resource riches—coupled with the potential impact of climate change—has made the region an area of growing interest and concern.
> Canada has a choice when it comes to defending our sovereignty over the Arctic.
> We either use it or lose it.
> And make no mistake, this Government intends to use it.
> Because Canada's Arctic is central to our identity as a northern nation (Harper 2007).

In a subsequent speech delivered in the Northwest Territories in March 2008, Canada's 'Arctic identity' was clearly critical:

> As Canadians, we see ourselves as a Northern people. The great white North is as much a part of Canada's identity as the red maple leaf . . . We're committed to helping the region and its residents realize their true potential (Harper 2008a).

Using the two key sources, the speeches from the throne for 2007 and 2010, this note is intended as an initial stock taking exercise of Canada's Arctic policy under the Harper government and deals with the manner in which both Canada and the Arctic have been represented. However, these sources are complemented by some of the commentary surrounding recent events including the March 2010 meeting of the five Arctic Ocean coastal states in Canada alongside the April 2010 Russian-Norwegian agreement over their common maritime boundary under the Barents Sea (*EU Observer*, Brussels, 28 April 2010). One conclusion drawn here is to suggest that Canada's 'posturing' on sovereignty stands at apparent odds with wider circumpolar developments, which are heading towards more co-operative outcomes (on sovereignty and posturing, see Dodds 2010).

Speech from the Throne: The Harper government in 2007 and 2010

The speeches are an important source because they are public announcements, which are widely reported both within Canada and beyond. As statements of intent, they provide opportunities to reflect on the manner in which, in this case, the Arctic is presented to both domestic and international audiences. The 2007 speech was presented on 16 October, and the Arctic featured in a section entitled 'Strengthening Canada's Sovereignty and Place in the World' (Canada 2007). Within the speech itself, a number of themes deserve particular attention because it is important to recall that it was delivered in the aftermath of the high profile Arktika expedition to the bottom

of the central Arctic Ocean. More than any other event in recent years, the images of the Russian flag being carefully placed on the seabed provoked passionate reaction and debate in other Arctic coastal states including Canada (Dodds 2008; Byers 2009). With Canadian newspapers and media channels claiming that the Russians were seeking to 'annex' the North Pole, renewed emphasis was placed on the importance of Canada's mapping its outer continental shelf regions in the Arctic (CBC 2007). As the speech noted: [a]s part of asserting sovereignty in the Arctic, our government will complete comprehensive mapping of Canada's Arctic seabed. Never before has this part of Canada's ocean floor been fully mapped.

The need, therefore, to map Canada's ocean floor is linked explicitly with a more assertive approach towards sovereignty.

The 'North' is also positioned within the 2007 speech as a space that is both an integral part of Canada and yet also neglected. It is both exceptional and unexceptional. As the speech notes:

> But the North needs new attention. New opportunities are emerging across the Arctic, and new challenges from other shores. Our government will bring forward an integrated northern strategy focused on strengthening Canada's sovereignty, protecting our environmental heritage, promoting economic and social development, and improving and devolving governance, so that northerners have greater control over their destinies.
>
> To take advantage of the North's vast opportunities, northerners must be able to meet their basic needs. Our government will work to continue to improve living conditions in the North for First Nations and Inuit through better housing.

Finally, the 2007 speech highlighted the importance of action in the Canadian Arctic. Although not delivered by Harper himself, the prime minister frequently delivers his Arctic-related speeches in a highly assertive fashion. Frequently standing behind Canadian flags, and or speaking in different Arctic locations, the speech reinforced a point Harper has frequently reaffirmed:

> Defending our sovereignty in the North also demands that we maintain the capacity to act. New arctic patrol ships and expanded aerial surveillance will guard Canada's Far North and the Northwest Passage. As well, the size and capabilities of the Arctic Rangers will be expanded to better patrol our vast Arctic territory.

What has changed when we examine the 2010 speech? In a policy making context, the government announced a *Northern Strategy* (2007), which sets out the determination of the Harper administration to develop Canada's infrastructural power to monitor and survey the north. The references to 'patrol ships', 'aerial surveillance' and 'Arctic Rangers' emphasises land, sea and airborne capabilities in a context in which the 'opening up' of the Arctic has been interpreted as 'challenging' to Canadian sovereignty. The 2008 budget confirmed increased funding for seabed mapping and for new shipping investment.

Within a section entitled 'Strengthening a United Canada in a Changing World', the 2010 speech develops a number of themes. There is some obvious continuity, especially with the links to identity and the importance of the north itself:

> *We are a northern country*. Canadians are deeply influenced by the vast expanse of our Arctic and its history and legends. Our Government established the Northern Strategy to realize the potential of Canada's North for northerners and all Canadians.

The subject of resource exploitation and northern communities are also noted again, as in previous speeches. As the 2010 speech noted:

> The Joint Review Panel on the Mackenzie Gas Project has completed its report. Our Government will reform the northern regulatory regime to ensure that the region's resource potential can be developed where commercially viable while ensuring a better process for protecting our environment.
>
> It will continue to give northerners a greater say over their own future and take further steps toward territorial devolution.

One striking difference is that the speech refers to 'northerners' rather than First Nations and Inuit and makes no reference to the social conditions facing indigenous communities such as cost of living, social deprivation not to mention inadequate housing (compare Simon 2009).

While sovereignty features again in the 2010 speech, it does so in a way that is clearly influenced by subsequent events.

> Our Government will continue to vigorously defend Canada's Arctic sovereignty. It will continue to map our northern resources and waters. It will take action to increase marine safety and reduce pollution from shipping and other maritime traffic.
>
> Our Government will also work with other northern countries to settle boundary disagreements.

In contrast with the 2007 speech, the reference to 'other northern countries' and 'to settle boundary disagreements' is clearly a subtle reference to the 2008 Ilulissat declaration, which reaffirmed the determination of the five Arctic Ocean coastal states (Canada, Denmark, Norway, Russia and the United States) to settle their outer limits to the continental shelf via the provisions outlined within the Law of the Sea (Denmark 2008). To that end, Canada has co-operated with Denmark and the United States over joint mapping projects. Canada, however, also has outstanding disagreements over the maritime delimitation of the Beaufort Sea, the status of the Northwest Passage and the ownership of Hans Island. But what the Iluslissat meeting did was to affirm the importance of those five coastal states at the expense of other permanent members of the Arctic Council (for example Iceland) and transnational circumpolar organisations such as the Sami Council let alone others such as the European Union (Koivurova 2010).

Canada's Arctic policy: an assertive geopolitics?

What links the two speeches of 2007 and 2010 is a vivid sense of assertion and the need to take action as epitomised by the 'use or lose it' mantra of Harper himself. The political and physical opening up of the Arctic is key to this, and indeed underwrites a great deal of contemporary Canadian political discourse, which is filled with an underlying anxiety about the accessibility of Canada's third coastline. While the 2010 speech refers to '[o]ur Government will also work with other northern countries to settle boundary disagreements', the Canadian government has been reaffirming the importance of the 'north' and 'northerners' in policy discourse.

It has led, under Harper's administration, to a re-positioning of Canada last seen when John Diefenbaker was primer minister in the 1950s. As Harper has acknowledged, while announcing a new icebreaker named in honour of Diefenbaker, the parallels were worthy of comment.

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> Prime Minister Diefenbaker is no longer with us, but the geopolitical importance of the Arctic and Canada's interests in it have never been greater. This is why our government has launched an ambitious Northern Agenda based on the timeless responsibility imposed by our national anthem, to keep the True North strong and free (Harper 2008b).

In the contemporary era, unlike the 1950s, the Canadian Arctic is increasingly less 'protected' by the presence of sea ice and inclement weather. Defence statements have warned of an Arctic in which a range of non-state and state actors might encroach and invade Canadian waters. The Canada First Defence Strategy (2008) warns as follows.

> The government recognizes the challenges Canada's sovereignty in the Arctic could face in the future. In the coming years, sovereignty and security challenges will become more pressing as the impact of climate change leads to enhanced activity throughout the region. The defence of Canada's sovereignty and the protection of territorial integrity in the Arctic remains a top priority for the government' (Harper 2008c).

As a consequence, 6–8 Arctic patrol ships are cited as a necessary development because the Arctic is identified as a core mission.

What is striking about the Diefenbaker era, and here the parallel with the Harper administration is noteworthy, is a shared concern with the United States. During the cold war, Canada became an important ally of the United States and the Arctic was a frontline in the struggle with the Soviet Union. As part of militarisation of the Arctic, US forces worked with Canadian counterparts to develop infrastructure for the North American Arctic including radar warning lines and collaborated with one another in terms of military exercises and planning. The 1957 NORAD agreement epitomised this shared commitment to continental defence (Lackenbauer and Farish 2007). Over time, however, these acts of co-operation were seen, at least within Canada, to be double-edged. The legal status of the Northwest Passage (NWP) is one long standing example with US submarines and later ice-breakers passing through it without due acknowledgement that they were traversing Canadian internal waters. Despite Canadian protests, the Obama administration had not changed the US position that the NWP is an international strait, where rights of transit passage prevail without having to seek any prior permission of a coastal state (Pharand 2007; Riddell-Dixon 2009). This follows a 2009 presidential directive issued in the last days of the Bush administration that reaffirms that basic position (United States 2009).

The Harper government has emphasised, and continues to emphasise, the role of the federal government and the Prime Minister's Office (PMO) specifically. The emphasis on Arctic sovereignty in particular sits somewhat uneasily with different understandings of security, military, environmental and/or human. Harper's frequent visits to the Canadian north often, perhaps unwittingly, reinforce a rather traditional view of sovereignty as something that has to be performed in a distinctive visual manner; standing by oversized Canadian flags, conversing with military personnel including Arctic Rangers and/or announcing new infrastructural projects including new ships and bases. While Harper deploys an established Arctic sovereignty discourse, his government's actions and postures command considerable public support in part because of established cultural, literary and visual traditions associated with the Canadian north (Shields 1991; Coates and others 2008).

But there are dangers too. In the March 2010 meeting of the five Arctic Ocean coastal states in Canada, a follow up to the Ilulissat declaration, US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton was reportedly critical of the lack of representation for indigenous peoples and other Arctic states that are members of the Arctic Council (for example Finland). As she noted, '[s]ignificant international discussions on Arctic issues should include those who have legitimate interests in the region. And I hope the Arctic will always showcase our ability to work together, not create new divisions' (cited in Bennett 2010). Canadian Foreign Minister, Lawrence Cannon, was then apparently forced to inform reporters that the meeting was not designed to circumvent the Arctic Council, a development that countries like Finland and Iceland had originally feared following the issuance of the Ilulissat declaration. The timing of the meeting was perhaps unfortunate in the sense that it coincided with the unwelcome decision (from the US perspective) of the Canadian government to leave Afghanistan in 2011. All of which left Harper to tell parliamentarians that, '[w]hether it comes to our role in Afghanistan, our sovereignty over our Arctic or ultimately our foreign-aid priorities, it is Canada and Canadians who will make Canadian decisions' (cited in the *Globe and Mail*, Toronto, 31 March 2010).

Conclusion

The current Canadian government's approach, as epitomised by the 2007 and 2010 speeches reinforces a dominant trend in its approach towards the Arctic. The focus on sovereignty and territorial integrity reinforces militarised understandings of security, with due emphasis given to the role of the military (and associated actors such as the coastguard), surveillance and monitoring, resource nationalism and limited co-operation, in particular with the four other coastal states (Heininen and Nicol 2007; Byers 2009; Coates and others 2008). The role of multilateral co-operation (beyond the coastal states) and the role of Inuit and first nations communities (beyond simply being a useful presence in the northern extremes of the country) seem to have diminished in visibility. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton's observation at the 2010 meeting of the five Arctic Ocean coastal states was in that regard telling. But as Mary Simon, President of the Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami, reflected in a lecture:

> The first is that *the Arctic is a region of Canada whose time has come*.
>
> Sovereignty, environmental, economic development and social policy factors all support this conclusion.
>
> The second is that *Sovereignty begins at home*. Canada cannot successfully assert its national agenda in the Arctic while ignoring the state of civil society in the Arctic.
>
> The third is that the key to sustainable Arctic policies and creative policy making in Canada must be anchored in establishing *a constructive partnership with Inuit* (Simon 2009, emphasis in the original speech).

A salutary reminder, in the aftermath of the March 2010 meeting of the five Arctic Ocean coastal states, that there are many more Arctic stakeholders than merely a limited number of geographically proximate nation states.

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The meridian transit beacons: a Shackleton legacy on South Georgia

Robert Burton

63 Common Lane, Hemingford Abbots, Huntingdon PE28 9AW (robert@burton41.co.uk)

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ABSTRACT. The construction and history of meridian transit beacons erected by members of the Imperial Trans-Antarctic Expedition at King Edward Cove, South Georgia, in 1914 are described.

Introduction

Sir Ernest Shackleton's Imperial Trans-Antarctic Expedition spent a month (5 November–5 December 1914) at South Georgia before S/Y *Endurance* headed south into the Weddell Sea. *Endurance* spent much of this time anchored in King Edward Cove where the expedition complement's duties ranged from restowing cargo to pursuing scientific studies. At the request of the whalers at Grytviken, the whaling station at the head of King Edward Cove, meridian transit beacons were erected above a cliff on the south side of the cove. These were two posts aligned true north-south, that is along the meridian, to facilitate the accurate swinging of ships' compasses. In a letter to Reginald Perris dated 30 November, Shackleton wrote as follows: 'The most important work done has been the erection of a set of true meridian posts so that the 21 whalers and other steamers can correct their compasses, which is a thing badly needed, and will be of interest to the Admiralty.' (Shackleton 1914).

In this context it should be noted that a ship's magnetic compass is affected by metal in the vessel as well as by the local magnetic variation. Corrections are made by 'swinging the compass'. The vessel is swung on its axis while 'compass north' is compared to 'true north' indicated by beacons in the true north-south meridian or, nowadays, by a sextant, gyrocompass or global positioning system receiver. Adjustments to the compass are made by positioning iron bars, spheres or magnets around the compass.

The beacons described

On the day after *Endurance*'s departure, the stipendiary magistrate, Edward Binnie, reported on the expedition's visit to the colonial secretary in Stanley, Falkland Islands. He mentioned that meridian transit beacons had been erected and attached a