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Chair

The Honourable Maxime Bernier

Standing Committee on National Defence

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● (1640)

[*Translation*]

The Chair (Hon. Maxime Bernier (Beauce, CPC)): Good afternoon to everyone. I would like to apologize to our two witnesses. We are an hour late because of parliamentary proceedings, but I am very pleased to see you here.

Pursuant to Standing Order 108(2) and the motion adopted by the Committee on Monday, February 23, 2009, we will continue, in the company of our witnesses, our study on Arctic sovereignty.

I am pleased to welcome Mr. Whitney Lackenbauer, associate professor and chair of the Department of History of St-Jerome's University, as well as Mr. Louis Fortier, scientific director, Network of Centres of Excellence ArticNet.

Good afternoon, gentleman.

[*English*]

Professor Lackenbauer, you can start, and then we'll listen to Professor Fortier.

[*Translation*]

The floor is yours for seven minutes.

[*English*]

Professor Whitney Lackenbauer (Associate Professor and Chair, Department of History, St. Jerome's University): Thank you very much, Mr. Chair, for the invitation to appear before the committee.

As Canadians we find ourselves in the midst of yet another so-called Arctic sovereignty crisis, this time precipitated by climate change, an alleged international race for resources, and uncertainty about boundaries and sovereign rights. Of course, we've been down this road before, with defence projects in the northwest during the Second World War, then the DEW Line, the *Manhattan* voyages, and the *Polar Sea* crisis of the mid-eighties.

Historically, political interest surges when Canadians perceive their sovereignty to be in jeopardy. Accordingly, promises were made to invest in the Canadian Forces to ensure Canada's stronger presence in its north. When the immediate crisis passed and Canadians realized sovereignty was not a clear and present danger, the commitment to invest in military capabilities, and in the north more generally, seemed to pass almost as soon as it began.

I do not share the same sense of alarm as some commentators who suggest that Canadian sovereignty is in dire straits and is melting away with the sea ice. From a legal standpoint, I agree with Alan Kessel's presentation a few weeks ago.

As a first pillar, I think we have to recognize that our sovereignty is not in serious jeopardy. This is thanks to the quiet diplomacy that has historically balanced continental security priorities with our national interests. I strongly believe the problems in the Arctic will not be resolved by a return to Cold War rhetoric and a reactive crisis-based mentality.

At the same time, we can't afford to be apathetic as a country. We have to invest in functional capabilities now to deal with the probable challenges we will encounter in the changing north, such as a major air disaster or an emergency such as an avalanche or an oil spill in our internal waters. The Russians are not likely to invade, nor are the Danes or the Americans. There is no conventional military threat to our Far North, nor will Canada solve its boundary disputes with a force of arms.

Given the mandate of this committee, I'm going to focus my comments on the role of the Canadian Forces in the evolving Arctic. I argue in my submission that a “Canada first” strategy is politically sound, but “Canada only” expectations are unrealistic. We have allies and we should be working with them in reinforcing security and stability in the region.

Furthermore, continuous talk about the need for a stronger Canadian Forces presence could undermine Canada's sovereignty. Suzanne Lalonde brought up the issue of the need for effective presence to bolster Canada's legal case, but I don't think anyone in the world, except for some Canadian commentators, is suggesting that Canada does not have sufficient presence in the north from a legal standpoint.

If possession is nine-tenths of the law and boots on the ground are important, then we're wise to acknowledge that we already have these elements in place, thanks to the Inuit and other northern residents. Presence is not the issue; it is capability. And as Dr. Lalonde said, it's about control.

The key to attaining a realistic level of control in northern waters, in my mind, is for the government to deliver on its announcements over the last few years. I have gone into more detail on specific elements in my submission, but the various CF platforms and infrastructure in which the government has promised to invest are reasonable and proportionate to the threats we're likely to face. The danger is that in an economic downturn these sorts of initiatives may be abandoned unless they're supported by the parties in opposition.

The difficulty is compounded by the simple fact that to date these individual announcements are not tantamount to a strategy. Furthermore, as Admiral McFadden alluded to in his presentation, a whole-of-government approach to the north is essential. Despite all the political emphasis on the Department of National Defence and the Canadian Forces, they are not the lead agency in most domestic incidents and do not have a standing mandate to enforce the laws of Canada. The CF's mandate is to play a supporting role to other departments and agencies, even in scenarios such as terrorist incidents, escorting nuclear-powered vessels, and fishery patrols and boardings.

Certainly, investment in military capabilities is required so the CF can operate in all parts of the country and can develop a more coherent, intelligent surveillance and reconnaissance network, which other witnesses have discussed in detail. I also suggest in my submission that establishing an Arctic marine security operation may help to improve Canadian Maritime Command awareness.

In terms of bilateral agreements, I don't think it's realistic to expect the U.S. to formally recognize the Northwest Passage as Canadian internal waters. Indeed, I fear that pushing for international clarity on the legal status of the passage may place Canada in a lose-lose situation. We can talk about this more during question period if the committee wishes.

Instead, we might envision the possibility of creating a combined Arctic command to coordinate Canada's Joint Task Force (North) with the U.S. Northern Command surveillance and response efforts. Perhaps this could include a Canada-U.S. joint operational planning group with access to NORAD planning staff.

Most importantly, I think, northerners must be the key participants in any assertion of Canadian control. The Inuit line that it should not be “use it or lose it” but “use us” that guides Canada's northern strategy is right on the mark.

● (1645)

The military is very fortunate to have a positive image in northern communities, thanks to the 4,343 Canadian Rangers we have in this country. More than half of these Rangers serve in the territorial north or in Nunavik and Nunatsiavut. These men and women are representative of their communities, perform important military and civilian functions, and are an incredible success story.

Understandably, when you have something good, you want to invest in it and make it better, so the government has promised to expand and enhance this component of the CF reserves. This is admirable, but I also want to emphasize that it must be done in a realistic and sustainable way or this important community-based asset will be set up to fail.

First of all, there have been commitments to increase the number of Rangers in the Arctic and thus expand Canadian surveillance. We might consider how realistic it is to expect much expansion in the Arctic, given that every community along the Northwest Passage that can sustain a patrol already has one. Northerners already serve in the Rangers at more six times the rate of Canadian service in the CF more generally. Can we really expect more of northerners?

A recent Fisheries and Oceans committee report recommended that the Rangers be given a marine capability, and media coverage spoke of the potential for a more combat-oriented role, including boarding foreign vessels. In response, several Rangers reported they would resign if these new roles were assigned to them. This fits with what I've personally heard from Rangers over the past decade.

Instead, the government should stick to the basics: deliver on promised uniforms for the Rangers, as well as replacement rifles; increase the amount of money they receive for wear and tear on their personal equipment during training and operations; and provide more support for training and administration by increasing the number of Ranger instructors and headquarters staff. The whole purpose of expanding and enhancing should be to reinforce success, not to reinvent the Rangers to carry out tasks for which they are ill-suited and that they are not intended to provide.

They are not, and never will be, an interdiction force. They are lightly equipped self-sufficient volunteers who are not required to undertake annual training. They are, at the core, a very positive example of a constructive relationship between northerners and the federal government. The Rangers are not “broken” and my simple message is that the key is to not break them.

I'll wrap up by saying that a northern vision has a potential to unite us all. Following through on promised investments in the CF and implementing a long-term northern strategy will certainly contribute to a stronger Canada.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Professor.

Now we'll give the floor to Monsieur Fortier.

[*Translation*]

Prof. Louis Fortier (Scientific Director, Network of Centers of Excellence ArcticNet, Université Laval): Good afternoon, Mr. Chair and members of the committee. Thank you for inviting me to the 24th meeting of the standing committee.

I am professor of oceanography at Laval University and scientific leader for the research icebreaker Amundsen, which you are perhaps familiar with, as well as scientific director of ArcticNet, Canada's Network of Centres of Excellence, which studies the impacts of climate change and modernization on the maritime Canadian Arctic. I am certainly no geopolitical specialist like my colleague, but I follow closely and even participate in the debates and works of my colleagues who are experts in this field.

[*English*]

ArcticNet brings together about 110 Arctic specialists in 27 Canadian universities and six federal departments and agencies. A central objective of our network is to inform policy and adaptation strategies to minimize the negative impacts of change in the Arctic and, if possible, maximize the positive outcomes of those changes.

One of the main tools of ArcticNet is the research icebreaker *Amundsen*, which enables our international teams to reach the Arctic seas and their shores. Through its regular presence in the Canadian Arctic and its visibility in Canadian and foreign media, the *Amundsen* contributes substantially, I would say, to asserting Canadian sovereignty over these remote maritime regions.

Within the ArcticNet scientific program, we have several projects that address the issue of Canada's sovereignty over its Arctic seas.

Let's recall first that Canadian sovereignty over the islands of the Canadian Archipelago has been recognized by the international community since the 1930s. As experts in international law have explained to you with much more competence than I possess, the major issues of Arctic sovereignty for Canada concern the Arctic seas, not the lands or the islands.

For me, there are essentially two issues. The first is the status of the straits of the Canadian Archipelago, including the Northwest Passage. The question is, are these straits Canadian internal waters on which Canada has full control over the traffic—that's the Canadian position—or are they international straits linking two international bodies of water and therefore open for what is called the “innocent passage” of surface vessels? That's the American and European position.

The second large issue of sovereignty in the Arctic is the claim by Canada to a fraction of the Arctic Ocean beyond the present 200-mile limit within the framework of the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea.

These two issues are fairly separate. They're not linked in any specific way.

● (1650)

[*Translation*]

These are two issues of strategic importance, the outcome of which will affect Canada's standing in the international community and, potentially, redefine the missing Arctic dimension of Canada.

[*English*]

Concerning the Northwest Passage, Canada has been reactive rather than proactive for way too long. If a clear position had been expressed 50 years ago when the passage was choked with ice, the situation would likely have been resolved to the advantage of Canada. Thus, our group, ArcticNet, and our investigators fully support the recent initiatives of the federal government to strengthen the Canadian presence in the Arctic.

Among other things, there have been the announcement of the building of a research station in the High Arctic; the announcement of a polar class icebreaker, the *Diefenbaker*; opposing the selling of RADARSAT-2 to American interests; and also the very firm position on the Arctic taken recently by the Minister of Foreign Affairs.

As for the expansion of Canada's jurisdiction beyond the 200-mile limit in the Arctic Ocean, it must be emphasized that the interest of this expansion is essentially strategic, not economic. It is often believed that Canada will gain exclusive access to vast mineral, petroleum, and fisheries resources.

However, such resources are distributed primarily on the shallow continental shelves over which we already have sovereignty—and recognized sovereignty—so this sovereignty is not challenged except for minor border skirmishes with the U.S.A. on the western Arctic front. We know that fisheries resources in the deep basin are insignificant. We also know that whatever petroleum or mineral resources are available there, it would be technically impossible to exploit them.

The strategic importance of this offshore region should nevertheless not be neglected, since a seasonally ice-free Arctic Ocean with its new marine routes would likely play the same role as the Mediterranean Sea played in antiquity. It's going to be of extreme strategic importance.

If we come to the role of the Department of National Defence in asserting our sovereignty in the Arctic, the first evidence is that Canada does not possess the means, military or other, to monitor the immense maritime territory that is at stake. Beyond simple surveillance, our capacity to respond directly at sea to military or security situations is extremely weak, especially during the winter months.

Without attempting to give a full overview of the situation, let's just mention that the 18 Aurora aircraft that are deployed by DND to monitor the entire Arctic territory provide very little capacity to act in the Arctic seas if something happens there. The two heavy icebreakers that we have and the four medium icebreakers of the Canadian Coast Guard are deployed in the Arctic for the summer months only and leave the area by early October. We can compare this with the Russian fleet of icebreakers, which at this time, although declining, still comprises about 12 heavy icebreakers that all surpass in size and power the most powerful Canadian icebreakers.

[*Translation*]

As early as 2005, ArcticNet recommended the building in Canada of at least two polar-class icebreakers. The recent announcement of the Diefenbaker, to be delivered by 2017, partially fulfils this recommendation. On the other hand, to give the new frigates of the Canadian Navy some limited capacity to break ice is generally considered a poor decision. Experts doubt that the ships will have much utility in the Arctic except in the summer months, while the structural modifications allowing them to break ice will greatly reduce their performance in open waters.

● (1655)

[*English*]

In conclusion, taking into account that Arctic sovereignty is first and foremost a maritime issue, I have the following general recommendations to consolidate the role of DND.

First of all, we need to augment progressively the country's airborne and satellite capacity to monitor its Arctic seas by expanding and upgrading the aircraft fleet and by supporting the development of the Arctic remote sensing program of the Canadian Space Agency.

Furthermore, to provide a suitable capacity to act on the ground, if you will, in our immense Arctic maritime territory, Canada needs at least two polar class icebreakers that can operate for 9 out of 12 months in the area. So in addition to the *Diefenbaker*, I would recommend that we start building a second icebreaker. Of course, as long as I don't have to pay personally for the bill, it's okay with me.

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

Prof. Louis Fortier: It's urgent for Canada to plan and execute the replacement of its fleet of medium-class icebreakers by much more powerful and versatile ships. The building of these new fleets, now scheduled to start in 2020, should actually begin now. It's also important that these new icebreakers be given a multi-task role, including escort, de-icing, research and rescue, sealift, national security and surveillance, and military operations, but also including support for scientific research and the implementation of fisheries and shipping regulations and policies.

In general, analysts and stakeholders agree that the development of this new fleet of icebreakers is unnecessarily slow. It should be much faster. It could be substantially accelerated, which would provide new economic incentives in several regions of Canada.

National Defence and the Canadian Coast Guard already collaborate on several fronts in the Arctic, so I think the military expertise of DND and the navigational expertise of the coast guard in icy waters should be combined to implement Canada's strategic goals and policy in the Arctic, rather than giving the mandate in total to one or the other of these two agencies. There also is a need to move up the Arctic in the priorities of DND headquarters, from my personal experience.

That's my message to you this afternoon.

Again, thank you very much for inviting me.

[*Translation*]

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Fortier.

I will now turn the floor over to the official opposition for seven minutes, beginning with Mr. Wilfert.

[*English*]

Hon. Bryon Wilfert (Richmond Hill, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I'll split my time with Mr. Bagnell.

Thank you, gentlemen, for coming. Both of you emphasize capabilities and presence in your remarks. Some commentators and some witnesses have indicated that, really, a lot of what the government has announced so far is more bravado than real action and that in fact there is no real strategy.

The Senate, in their report, announced that they would like to see an Arctic strategy advisory committee with many more tools than the present northern sovereignty committee, and that in fact the government's measures have been hit and miss in trying to deliver on some of the points you indicated. There have been criticisms of the icebreakers, as an example.

Regarding the need to really develop a clear, coherent strategy to deal with the issues of climate change, sovereignty, and coordination with aboriginals, Inuit, and the coast guard, could you comment briefly on the fact that Indian and Northern Affairs is the lead agency but that in reality there has been little effective cooperation in developing a strategy to achieve the goals you gentlemen have pointed out?

Prof. Whitney Lackenbauer: On the absence of an integrated strategy, since 2005 there was a strategy being unveiled. It hasn't.... There have been promises have been repeated over the last number of years that one was going to be coming out. We're still waiting. I heard rumours that it was to be as early as this April, but that has come and gone. So I know it has been worked on.

What are some of the mechanisms that could be developed?

I've put forward a suggestion elsewhere for maybe revitalizing or resurrecting the advisory committee on northern development, which used to exist in the heady days of the late 1940s, through the DEW Line, and right through into the 1970s. Taking it up to that level, you would have senior civil servants at the DM level, and with involvement, at this point, of aboriginal organizations.

There are also proposals about a domestic Arctic council, which would perhaps be called an Arctic Canada council, with representatives coming together from the federal government, provincial governments, and land claim governments, as well as various aboriginal international organizations.

I think all of this points in the direction of the need for a dialogue, once we get past the idea there's an urgent need to deal with a military crisis that in my view is just not there. We need to recognize that we have the time to sit down and talk and actually come up with a sustainable policy or strategy, something that we perhaps haven't seen since the days of the 1950s. But we all know that Diefenbaker's version was blurry when it came to actually implementing his great vision. I hope it's different this time around.

● (1700)

Prof. Louis Fortier: To the list of concerns you mentioned, I would add economic development, the exploitation of resources in the arctic, like the oil and gas, which is picking up again, and the mining. I think it was the right thing to have INAC try to coordinate the different departments in the Arctic, as long as the Arctic question was not so urgent.

It boils down to this: do we need a more Arctic-oriented body rather than a north-oriented one? This idea of having an agency for the Arctic, or even a full department, has been discussed before. I think if we want to give Canada back its arctic dimension, which has been missing for a long time, then we should study the question of creating a new agency or department for the Arctic.

Hon. Larry Bagnell (Yukon, Lib.): I agree that the resource level may be right, but I have a problem with the configuration of those resources. Let's take the big icebreaker. The professor at our last meeting said that instead of having this Cadillac we should have three Fords, three smaller ones. The patrol boats, I agree, shouldn't be Arctic patrol boats, because they can't go in there. The port is not on the Northwest Passage. There's no western port.

The planes for Yellowknife have been cancelled, the ice-strengthened supply ships have been cancelled, and the new fleet of search-and-rescue planes has not been delivered and none are slated for north of 60. There were four reserves announced, which is fantastic, but none of them are going to be north of 60. They'll be in the south.

You talked about the good of having northern science and Arctic research. That's great, but they're closing the one at Alert, the one closest to the North Pole. They're closing CFCAS, which had dozens and dozens of researchers. There's no capacity to clean up oil spills under ice.

Prof. Louis Fortier: If we compare the fleet in Russia to the fleet we have here in Canada, it's obvious that we're not on par with them. The fleet is in good condition, but it's aging. Some of those ships will have to be put on the selling block or scrapped soon.

I think the fleet in Russia is too large, too powerful, and too assertive of sovereignty and everything. There was a huge agenda during the Soviet era to build a large fleet and to open the northern route for 12 months a year. I don't think you need to do that.

It's obvious that what we have in Canada is too little compared with what we need. For me, the best way to approach the problem is to increase our capacity by increasing the icebreaker fleet. The thing is, it takes a long time to build those ships, and if we don't start now, it won't be until maybe 2030 that we have the capacity we need. It's the icebreakers that are central and this is where we should put our efforts.

Prof. Whitney Lackenbauer: I'm not as critical as you are of the Arctic offshore patrol vessels. It could be a versatile platform if it's coupled with a recapitalized coast guard and the Nanisivik facility. I have questions about the Nanisivik facility, but about the location. I think Lancaster Sound is actually a prime location, particularly with this federally owned infrastructure that we can piggyback on to make it more cost effective. It will add important civilian applications, particularly for the coast guard.

I think the big question is this: what infrastructure is required to support future activities in the region? Should this be a limited docking site, berthing facility, and refueling site, or should it be expanded with runways and air force operating locations so that it can support Globemaster operations? I think the government has to provide more clarity on its logistics needs before it completes its plans in 2010.

As for southern-based forces, this is a debate that's been going on since the 1940s about whether or not we can station forces in the north. At this time, given the military threats we're facing, it's probably most cost effective and proportionate to the threats to keep our primary reserve and regular units to the south while giving more attention to the Canadian Rangers.

● (1705)

[*Translation*]

The Chair: Thank you very much.

I will now turn the floor over to Mr. Bachand.

Mr. Claude Bachand (Saint-Jean, BQ): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

[*English*]

Mr. Lackenbauer, if you don't speak French, you'll need your translation device, but if you speak French—

[*Translation*]

Prof. Whitney Lackenbauer: I understand, but I will answer in English.

Mr. Claude Bachand: Very well.

You both referred to the ability to control the territory and to what happens on the surface of the ocean. Many people have told us that it is extremely important to control our air space as well. I'm referring here to the intrusion, proximity or possible intrusion of the Russian bomber plane. However, for our committee, submarines are our greatest concern. Mr. Pharand, who is an expert on the far north, told us that it is important to know who is navigating under our waters. He even suggested establishing narrow channels in the Arctic to ensure that all traffic transits through there and to be able to identify it.

Mr. Fortier did refer to this when h spoke of the famous icebreakers, but neither of you mentioned the fact that the UN Commission on the Limits of the Continental Shelf has just granted 230,000 square kilometres to Norway. We are scheduled to complete our study in 2013. Is this an extremely important scientific aspect that we will have to take into account to justify Canada's position on territorial and underwater claims in the far North?

Prof. Louis Fortier: Without doubt, this is extremely important. The set of seismological data that we need is very difficult to obtain for Canada. It is absolutely crucial in order to justify our request to the committee. On the Russian side, the ice entirely disappears during two or three weeks in the summer, sometimes during six or eight weeks in recent years. All this ice tends to accumulate on the Canadian side, and this is a problem, because very few of our icebreakers are capable of doing the work. The *Louis St-Laurent* can do it, but it has to collaborate with the American ship called *Healy*. Moreover, the conditions are extremely difficult for us. Thus, we are at a clear disadvantage as compared to the Russians, who have already obtained enough quality data to support their application.

[*English*]

Prof. Whitney Lackenbauer: I think you're raising a number of important issues. Certainly, in terms of the timeline, I think partly it's.... I'll tie this back to the issue of rhetoric. We have to be careful not to get ahead of ourselves in political grandstanding vis-à-vis the Americans or the Russians. We haven't yet even submitted our claims, so really, a lot of the bluster is about potentially losing something that we haven't even claimed yet. To me, this seems to be putting the cart before the horse.

I'm a bit concerned. Let's wait and see. When the Russians submitted their data and it wasn't as rigorous as the commissioners wanted, the United Nations sent it back and said, “Come on, give us better data”. So I think a lot of the alarmism surrounding this 2013 deadline is sometimes overplayed.

You asked important questions about submarines. On some of the *références* or comments about the need for subsurface acoustic rays, or whatever the modern technology is, at choke points, I think it is important, but I still think it always comes back to the same common denominator: we have allies who are submarine-capable and who are gathering data. As for whether we have some sort of arrangement that goes back to the 1960s with them to share that information on an agree-to-disagree basis, I can't know, and I wouldn't want to know, because it would prejudice that agreement.

If we don't have some sort of arrangement with the Americans, rather than thinking that we need to gather all this intelligence ourselves, this, to me, seems a good pretext to sit down and say, "Look, we understand that for geostrategic reasons you're not going to acknowledge that these waters, this Northwest Passage, are internal straits." It has little to do with the Arctic, and it has everything to do with the Strait of Hormuz and other strategic straits around the world.

We acknowledge that as Canadians we're confident in our sovereignty. We can sit down and negotiate as equals and figure out ways of sharing information under the auspices of NORAD, thanks to its expansion into the maritime domain. I think there are opportunities here for creative diplomacy on the part of Canada when we get out of this need to grandstand over Arctic sovereignty issues and sit down and do the diplomatic work that's needed to come up with lasting resolutions.

● (1710)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Claude Bachand: Do you think that the United Nations Commission on the Limits of the Continental Shelf is on the right track?

[*English*]

Prof. Whitney Lackenbauer: Once again, historically, every time we've engaged in boundary limitation discussions, it has always involved a certain number of concessions. For Canada to think that somehow we should be making our claims, and that everybody in the world is going to accept them, to me is a bit naive, but that seems to be some of the rhetoric that's emanating from this country.

It is important to recognize, especially in terms of the Russians, that when they are talking about their GDP, 20% of it is generated north of the Arctic Circle. Twenty-two percent of their exports are generated north of the Arctic Circle. When they're talking about the Arctic, and when they are posturing about the Arctic, it is core to their economy. It's a fraction of 1% of Canada's GDP. When we get concerned about what signals the Russians are giving to us, I think we also have to respect that they have to play to a domestic audience, and it's an even bigger issue to their domestic audience than, I dare say, it is to ours.

In terms of investing, I think we've allocated the resources that are needed. Now it is important to turn it over to the scientists for the diplomats to be prepared in building our case as best they can, but we must recognize that the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea and the conventions related to the continental shelf are crystal clear.

This isn't about losing something. It's about us figuring out what we're entitled to, and what we're entitled to based upon clear international law. If there are some points of divergence with our neighbours, we'll sit down and negotiate, because that's what we always do when we're defining boundaries.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Claude Bachand: Mr. Fortier, let me come back to you. We were told that for Canadian claims on the continental shelf, Canada has joined with a Danish team to refine the study. Did they meet on board of the icebreaker *Amundsen*?

Prof. Louis Fortier: Another ship is being used, Mr. Bachand, the *Louis S. St-Laurent*, which is Canada's biggest icebreaker.

Mr. Claude Bachand: It is a Canadian ship nonetheless.

Prof. Louis Fortier: This ship works in collaboration with the *Healy*, which is the new American icebreaker. In the western Arctic, in the Beaufort Sea, these are the two ships that are carrying out the study. In the eastern Arctic, between Greenland and Canada, the line is jointly drawn by Canadians and Danes, and not from icebreakers, but right on the pack ice because it is too thick in that place.

Some expeditions have attempted to take seismological measurements from the pack ice, and it proved to be extremely difficult. We have made very little progress in the eastern Arctic, whereas in the western Arctic, with the icebreakers, we have made some progress.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Mr. Fortier.

Now I must give the floor to Mr. Harris.

[*English*]

Mr. Jack Harris (St. John's East, NDP): Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Thanks, both of you, for your excellent presentations.

I guess I could say that I'm hearing from both of you a sense of urgency about certain matters. If I may paraphrase not only your evidence, but that of others, we don't really have a lot to worry about with respect to the land issues or even the continental shelf issues. It's a matter of doing the homework, of getting the data together. I don't know if you mentioned this outright, but the issue of the Americans in terms of the boundary is something that's manageable and perhaps should be settled, but there is still some uncertainty about the Northwest Passage.

We were told by Professor Byers that we ought to be ready to deal with possible issues as early as next summer because of the rapidly changing patterns in the extent of summer sea ice. I also want to bring to your attention the fact that Professor Pharand has referred us to a paper of his in which he has 12 things that Canada ought to do—and you've mentioned some of them, Professor Fortier—not to be pushy about our position on the Northwest Passage, but to bolster our claim by action in terms of navigation, making NORDREG mandatory, and some of the things you have suggested, such as having additional radar capacity, etc.

Concerning the sense of urgency that I'm sensing from you and the issues that need to be dealt with, how can we deal with something as early as next year if we're talking about a ship that seeks to go through the Northwest Passage, not respect Canada's issue of sovereignty, and not want to comply with our navigation and our Arctic Waters Pollution Prevention Act, for example?

Prof. Whitney Lackenbauer: Again, we have commentaries from Michael Byers and Rob Hubert, who are always coming up with worst-case scenarios. This is what they thrive on. The media absolutely love it.

I'm not sure what evidence there is or what the probability is that we're going to have some sort of foreign incursion that's going to seek to undermine us next year. In terms of investing in capabilities, I think we're both certainly making the case to say that things are needed.

In terms of the need to bolster our claim by action, I really appreciate the question and the tenor of the question. Part of my concern is that individuals like Michael Byers are always talking about our claims. This isn't about our claims; it's about our sovereignty. We do possess sovereignty in this region and we're out to exercise it in various ways. NORDREG is a step that the government has proposed to take.

I'm perhaps more cautious than others in suggesting that there is a downside to making NORDREG mandatory, in that foreign nations, once we declare it mandatory, will come to us and say, "Here's a letter of protest because we don't agree with you." They haven't done that to date. The more of those protest letters we have building up over time, the less we can say that there's been foreign acquiescence to our claims, and that's partly served by just lying low on these things.

So there's a downside. Assertiveness may be appropriate in some situations, I guess. I'm not sure the threat is so acute that we need to be worried about what's going to happen as early as next summer. I think that's perhaps getting overly alarmist. As for having the steps in place, certainly there have been a lot of suggestions about what we might do.

● (1715)

Prof. Louis Fortier: I concur with Whitney that it's not in the next year that there's urgency, but in 10 years from now, we have to be ready to control increased traffic, increased oil spill problems, whatever. Offshore exploration for oil and gas is developing. There are going to be issues of transporting the crude oil, if we find any. The traffic is likely to increase—at least the national traffic, maybe not the intercontinental traffic—in the next 10 years and to build the capacity is going to take 7 to 10 years. The urgency is that the decisions will be taken now.

Mr. Jack Harris: Mr. Fortier, you talked about the cooperation and the role of DND versus the coast guard. One of the suggestions made was that these two agencies could work together in certain ways, but you could also have some sort of cross-fertilization whereby you could have the coast guard officers and members of the reserve trained with certain capabilities. The coast guard vessels could be armed, helicopter support could be increased, etc.

So there could be an integrated role if we're dealing with somebody threatening to.... I'm talking about a commercial vessel now. You could board a ship from a coast guard vessel, which they do in fisheries enforcement in the Atlantic and the Pacific. Is that something you would see, that kind of more integrated relationship between the coast guard and the military? That would probably be cheaper than all these armed patrol vessels, etc. Is that something you see as feasible in the Canadian context?

Prof. Louis Fortier: Absolutely. This is exactly the way I see it. We don't need to militarize the Arctic at this stage. We're not looking for an invasion tomorrow or whatever. In my mind, it's important at this stage to combine the expertise of the coast guard and the expertise of DND to bring our military capability in the Arctic up to speed and to bring it up to the conditions there.

I'll give you an example. We were talking about those choking points where we could install listening devices to know what kind of submarine or underwater traffic is taking place. At this time, there is some development in Gascoyne Inlet in Lancaster Sound, and the coast guard is providing DND with support for that deployment. DND couldn't do it themselves, because they need to have access to the sea, the offshore working capability, which only the coast guard can provide them with at this time.

There are all kinds of examples like that. Whatever we develop with DND in the Arctic, it should be meshed with the expertise of the coast guard. I wouldn't go as far as to say that the coast guard should become integrated into DND, though, because if you look at the American coast guard, which is integrated into the army, the result is not very satisfactory.

Mr. Jack Harris: In what way? Could you elaborate on that?

Prof. Louis Fortier: From our point of view, to support research, for example, the American icebreakers are managed by the army, and the conditions are terrible for doing research. They're terrible to do support for other things, too, so I think it should be kept—

● (1720)

The Chair: Thank you very much, Mr. Fortier.

Thank you, Mr. Harris.

I will now give the floor to Mr. Hawn.

Mr. Laurie Hawn (Edmonton Centre, CPC): Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

Thank you both for being here.

I have a couple of questions, and then I will hand it off to Mr. Boughen.

Professor Fortier, you mentioned the importance of resource development and so on in the north. A couple of days ago, Professor Byers made the statement that he didn't think any resource development would happen for a hundred years. Do you share that view or do you think it's going to happen a little bit sooner than that?

Prof. Louis Fortier: I'm afraid I don't share Michael's opinion. He's a good colleague of mine. Just recently, for example, the government sold six claims in the Beaufort Sea offshore near the continental shelf edge, for a value of $2 billion. I think there will be some exploration, at least for the next 10 years, and not only in the Beaufort Sea. I think the exploration will move also to Baffin Bay and to some regions of the archipelago. Nobody can say what resources will be found, but for the next 10 years at least, there's going to be more intense exploration.

Then, if reserves or deposits are found there, for the next 30 years there's going to be some exploitation. It will not be the new Saudi Arabia, but there are very good chances that they will find something there.

Mr. Laurie Hawn: You seem to extoll the virtues of the *Diefenbaker*, the heavy icebreaker. Obviously we can afford one, or a limited number. Can you confirm your opinion of the capability and the requirement? Would you see it operating as part of an allied fleet of icebreakers along with the Americans and others up there?

Prof. Louis Fortier: We could. From a military point of view, I think it would be a good thing. But from a logistic point of view, from the point of view of taking action, I suppose, if a plane falls into that 400 km by 400 km patch, we don't even know what's happening. We have absolutely no clue on what's going on in the central archipelago. If we need to deploy forces there quickly, or assistance or search and rescue operations, at this time there's nothing we can do.

There's very little we can do in the winter months. In the summer months, the situation is better, but we absolutely need to have a Canadian capacity to do it. We shouldn't rely on our allies for that aspect.

Mr. Laurie Hawn: So you're saying we need a ship like the *Diefenbaker*.

Prof. Louis Fortier: We absolutely do need a ship like the *Diefenbaker*. My opinion is that we need two of them. With that infrastructure, if you have only one, most of the time it's going to be idle because it will be broken. If you have two, for some reason they work much better, and you get much more service out of them.

Mr. Laurie Hawn: For Mr. Lackenbauer, I have a couple of points. More than half of the Rangers are south of 60, and more than half of the Rangers are not Inuit.

Prof. Whitney Lackenbauer: Certainly, there has been a lot of misapprehension. First of all, we had Pierre Leblanc mention that the Rangers are a program. They're certainly not a program; they're an element of the Canadian Forces reserve. I was including Nunavik, which actually technically would push the numbers, yes, to about 45% located in one Canadian—

Mr. Laurie Hawn: Yes, I'm not trying to split hairs, but just to say that the Rangers have a significant presence south of 60 and a significant white element—

Prof. Whitney Lackenbauer: I think what is interesting is that the plans for expansion are promoting bringing the Rangers up to 5,000. This was a number that was talked about in the late 1940s when the Rangers were first created. It has never been realized historically. Most of that growth, I presume, based upon demographics, is actually going to occur south of 60, so to me, packaging Ranger enhancement and expansion as an Arctic sovereignty instrument is setting up expectations that, again, I'm worried may set the Rangers up to fail. These communities are already contributing in far greater numbers than southern Canadian communities are.

Mr. Laurie Hawn: Yes. “Northern” rather than “Arctic” might be a better word—

Prof. Whitney Lackenbauer: And isolated communities—

Mr. Laurie Hawn: Yes.

Prof. Whitney Lackenbauer: Certainly along the British Columbia coast and in Newfoundland, there are a lot of Rangers serving very proudly.

Mr. Laurie Hawn: Yes. Thank you very much.

I'll turn it over to Mr. Boughen now.

Mr. Ray Boughen (Palliser, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Gentlemen, let me extend my welcome to you, as my colleagues did, for sharing part of your afternoon with us. We appreciate it.

We hear different positions from different witnesses. I have a general question that I would like to hear your response to, either one or both of you.

We have people talking about submarines. We scramble some jets to intercept some bombers. We talk about the 200-mile shelf. We talk about icebreakers. We talk about the involvement of the U.S. and Norway.

Are we at that stage of development where we should, as the country of Canada, host these folks for some kind of discussion in terms of what should happen and who should do what? Should we partner with each other on icebreakers? Should we partner with each other in communications and exploration under the sea and on top of the sea? Are we at that point where we can say that there is a new frontier we can develop properly, both environmentally properly and financially properly? Are we there or are we still a ways back from that position?

● (1725)

Prof. Whitney Lackenbauer: I think we certainly could be there. It comes down to political will. If the Prime Minister is willing to take this on as one of his main efforts, seize this as a flagship, and leave his indelible imprint on the country, then indeed, this could be an appropriate time to take this sort of step. There already are forums in which we're continuously engaged, such as the Arctic Council, which, understandably, doesn't deal with security issues.

I think the time is indeed right. It would require following up on Minister Cannon's very admirable comments in his March speech in which he laid out a very constructive engagement with the circumpolar world. To pursue that particular course, I think, would be in Canada's strategic interest.

Prof. Louis Fortier: I'm no expert on all the questions, but my personal feeling is that before we invite them into a partnership, I think we have a lot of Canadian capacity to develop. Once we have a basic capacity, we can start inviting them.

This is a little bit the way we proceeded with science. It's like kids playing in a patch of sand, you know; if you don't bring any toys, you're not very popular.

Voices: Oh, oh!

Prof. Louis Fortier: So what we did with the science is that once we had the *Amundsen*, we started to invite the international community, and they started to invite us. So we have expeditions on Russian icebreakers in the Siberian Arctic and things like that.

I think we have to build our own toys in our patch of sand before we invite the other kids.

Mr. Ray Boughen: Right. So what I hear both of you saying is that it's a sequential kind of thing, with a base being established and then building on that base. I guess we're not quite ready to start with the base. Or should we start with the base as Canada and then invite the other folks in?

The Chair: We don't have enough time.

Can you answer in 10 seconds?

Prof. Louis Fortier: Let's start with the base. Once we're comfortable in our Arctic, let's invite the others.

[*Translation*]

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Thank you very much to our witness.

This concludes our meeting. I want to thank you for making yourselves available. And we, the committee members, will see each other again next week. Thank you.

The meeting is adjourned.

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