

Sovereignty & Military Power

Many people in government, the media and the general public find the current dispute over Hans Island mildly amusing. After all, who could be that concerned over a rock that is covered by snow for 10 months of the year? The fact is, it may turn out to be a significant diplomatic headache for this country. The question is not simply about having a presence on the rock, more importantly, it is about what lies under the littoral waters that surround this barren island.

Should we be concerned? You bet. It is the first indication, as predicted by authors Alvin Toffler in *Future Shock* and Samuel P. Huntington in *The Clash of Civilizations*, that a previously friendly, mature, stable and diplomatically astute nation is just as capable as a “rogue state” in playing power-politics to get what they feel is their “just due.”

As reserves of raw materials decline, such as the North Sea Oil fields, national revenues also diminish. Many nations now fear a resulting economic decline and a corresponding erosion of their standard of living. To compensate, they will seek to gain access to other areas where the necessary raw materials can be found and for which they can lay a claim to some degree of ownership, no matter how tenuous.

Whether it is oil and gas, minerals, fish stocks, marine mammals, or unrestricted passage, if Canadians do not take forceful action to address this challenge now, we may well be inviting the world to lay claim to our resources. We need to affirm that Canadian littoral waters – from Vancouver on the West Coast through the Arctic Archipelago down to the southernmost point on the East Coast – are indeed Canadian. All that flies above this littoral area, sails on the surface or plies its way under the surface, does so only with the concurrence of the Canadian people. We must also confirm to the world that we will not accept any claims for mineral, oil, or other rights within the littoral areas that we have declared as Canadian, and for nations to attempt to operate within these areas without Canadian agreement is a major breach of international law.

In keeping with the new Defence and International Policy Statements, Canadians need to know that the previous policy of notionally expressing our sovereignty by periodic aircraft flights, intermittent military exercises, the presence of a small

number of Canadian Rangers and even fewer RCMP, is no longer appropriate.

Domination of our littoral areas must be frequent and the presence of Canadian representatives must be accompanied by a capability of force and a national will to use it if necessary. Quite simply, the construction of Canadian iconic devices and the display of our national symbol afford little deterrence to nations intent on making claim to Canadian territory.

There is only one way to ensure that Canadian sovereignty is protected, and that is through the ability of the nation to exercise joint military power in concert with a strong foreign policy and an able diplomatic service. While foreign policy clearly delineates the consensus view of the nation within a strong framework of international law, and diplomatic services clearly convey our national stance, it will be left to the Canadian Forces to provide the guarantee to our sovereignty, by force of arms if necessary.

Appeasement is clearly not an option. This country is passed in trust from one generation to the next, and no one generation has the mandate to deal away resources or territory for the sake of a temporary respite. One should always remember Winston Churchill’s keen insight into appeasement as “the art of giving away nations and peoples to a hungry crocodile in the earnest hope that you will be eaten last or that he will have had his fill when your turn comes.”

To meet this requirement, the Air Force will need to play a pivotal role. Enhanced and frequent surveillance using maritime patrol aircraft, and patrolling Canada’s littoral waters on both coasts and in the Arctic Archipelago, will ensure that there are no incursions. If these flights find evidence of foreign activity, they will conduct a thorough sweep of the area to provide both digital and analog reconnais-

sance information to aid in decision-making. This will need to be done in conjunction with satellite surveillance in order to provide a comprehensive intelligence picture for the Government and concerned agencies.

It may be necessary to employ operational Air Force elements that possess both defensive and offensive capabilities to demonstrate Canadian control of the area. This deployment will be necessitated because only Air Force operational units possess the capability to mass such power within a geographical area in the shortest possible period of time.

Air power is the most efficient and economical means of power projection that will successfully fix and contain the threat element. Doing so permits the Government to take decisions on appropriate military and civil courses of action which will compel the unwelcome visitors to leave Canadian territory and waters.

If the Government elects to employ ground forces in some strength, the services of tactical aviation in the form of helicopter support for administration and operational support would be required. Depending upon the level of confrontation, Land Force Commanders would most likely request “Close Air Support” fighters to be in the vicinity and on priority call to either increase their combat potential or to deter any aggression from the opposing force.

If climate, location and speed are not major factors, the projected combat power of the Maritime Forces is considerable. Not only do they possess a strategic sub-surface surveillance capability, but also a wide array of surface and sub-surface sensors. Their weapons, capabilities and logistic support will greatly enhance any force deployed on sovereignty operations.

To preserve and protect Canadian sovereignty, the Government will need to employ a fully capable joint military force. As Denmark has so recently reminded us, domestic operations are not just about ice storms, floods and other national disasters. They can be about border incursions and the threat of loss of sovereignty over territory and resources. These are policy considerations that have yet to be addressed. Hopefully we do it soon. **FL**

Major Rob Day is a military historian and serving officer in the Air Force, working in Strategic Planning at NDHQ.