

NORTHERN AND ARCTIC SECURITY AND SOVEREIGNTY: CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES FOR A NORTHERN CORRIDOR

P. Whitney Lackenbauer and Katharina Koch

SUMMARY

The Canadian Northern Corridor (CNC) envisions an infrastructure network in the form of multimodal rights-of-way through Canada's northern and Arctic regions accompanied by an appropriate regulatory and governance structure (Fellows et al. 2020). Currently, the CNC is at a conceptual stage, which means that its regulatory framework, routing and implementation are under investigation. The CNC is multimodal in the sense that it consists of a range of linear infrastructure modes such as highways, railways and electricity transmission lines, and the concept considers various core issues related to infrastructure development (Fellows et al. 2020).

These issues include questions on governance and implementation, impact assessment strategies and Indigenous rights-holder engagement, as well as climate change and environmental transformations in the North. An important and related angle that must be included in the considerations of a CNC are questions about Canada's security and defence agenda, which involves critical and essential infrastructure development in its northern and Arctic regions. Fellows et al. (2020, 3) argue that the CNC could serve as a "single comprehensive and integrated body for corridor regulation and operation" while consolidating Canada's commercial and military strategic presence in the Arctic. The establishment of a single comprehensive and integrated body for corridor regulation and operation could enhance the capacity of local communities to plan and participate in long-term infrastructure projects.

For the purpose of identifying key security concerns and their relevance in the context of the CNC, this paper examines Canada's current security and defence priorities. We analyze Canada's geopolitical and strategic position in the Arctic and consider consequences of a CNC infrastructure network that would span Canada's northern and Arctic regions and connect them with transportation hubs in the south. The paper discusses several key elements underlining the infrastructure-security nexus derived from the Arctic and Northern Policy Framework (2019), which emphasizes the critical role of infrastructure for both regional and national prosperity and Canada's self-proclaimed role as guardian of its Arctic territory, environment and resources.

Five research questions provided to the authors inform the analysis:

- 1) What is the current status of Canada's sovereignty in the Arctic, particularly related to its maritime jurisdiction?
- 2) What are the roles of Indigenous Peoples in Canada's northern and Arctic security policies and strategies?
- 3) How are environmental challenges affecting Canada's global and strategic position in the Arctic?
- 4) What current and projected geopolitical and security challenges are relevant for the envisioned CNC?
- 5) How might the CNC contribute to Canada exercising sovereignty and bolstering security in the North?

The following analysis is based upon academic and think-tank literature as well as recent official documents related to Canada's northern and Arctic sovereignty and security, such as Canada's 2017 defence policy (*Strong, Secure, Engaged*) (SSE) and the Arctic and Northern Policy Framework (CIRNAC 2019). The authors also analyze statements from other governmental organizations involved in Canadian defence and security, such as the North American Aerospace Defense Command (NORAD).

Canada's northern and Arctic security agenda is rooted in three core assumptions. The first holds that Canada's Arctic sovereignty should be asserted through a robust military presence across remote northern regions (alongside the continuous presence of northern residents and civilian authorities). Second, the strategic interests of Russia, China and the United States significantly shape Arctic geopolitics and, by extension, Canada's security policies. Third, Canada is not likely to face conventional military threats in or to its Arctic region in the near future. Instead, Canada should focus on building Arctic military capabilities within an integrated "whole-of-government" or "whole-of-society" framework (policies developed through partnerships with northerners and other stakeholders) largely directed towards supporting domestic safety and soft security missions that represent the most likely incidents to occur in the Canadian Arctic. Given the potential of improved accessibility within and to Canada's northern remote regions and communities, security and defence strategists should focus on improving surveillance and monitoring equipment, as well as enhancing capacities for search-and-rescue missions, especially if northern infrastructure were to be developed in the context of a CNC for the purpose of enhanced commercial activities in the region.

The "whole-of-government" approach complements a CNC rights-of-way transportation network. Indeed, the CNC involves a broad suite of rights-holder and stakeholder networks which will inform its governance and implementation framework; thus, negotiations will take place between federal, provincial and territorial governments as well as Indigenous organizations and other stakeholders who may

be impacted by a CNC rights-of-way. The Department of National Defence (DND) will be involved in these deliberations to articulate defence and security considerations and concerns about vulnerabilities that CNC infrastructure and adjacent communities associated with increased regional activity (including in the Northwest Passage) may introduce or exacerbate.

In this regard, the paper frames the benefits of dual-use infrastructure and how a CNC might integrate civilian and military interests. Further, Canada's homeland defence is inextricably intertwined with that of the United States, with the Arctic a longstanding vector of potential aerial attack on North America. The CNC envisions a corridor rights-of-way that incorporates various forms of linear infrastructure (roads, railways and broadband) as well as point-to-point transportation hubs (such as Arctic marine ports). The corridor's routing will be based on various strategic decisions related to economic and environmental factors. In addition, CNC-related infrastructure in Canada's North should be scrutinized from a national security perspective in terms of how specific projects might enhance security or might introduce new security risks (particularly if they are supported by foreign investment).

On the flip side, northern and Arctic infrastructure provides a target for adversaries who seek to disrupt Canadian supply chains and logistic streams, including cyber-attacks to disrupt essential services across the country. From a security perspective, potential vulnerabilities emanating from disruptive events (including environmental disasters) must be considered in the planning and implementation of CNC infrastructure projects. While an external military attack against Canada over the next decade remains unlikely, recent examples revealing the vulnerability of infrastructure in remote regions to destruction or disruption (such as pipeline bombings or blockades) also reveal how a CNC rights-of-way and concomitant infrastructure will entail enhanced surveillance and monitoring requirements.

Further, a CNC will attract international attention. Some foreign actors will recognize an opportunity for enhanced trade with Canada through Arctic waters, as well as more feasible access to hitherto untapped northern and Arctic natural resources. By extension, the CNC could attract foreign investment that itself generates security concerns, as the recent federal security review of a Chinese company seeking to purchase a gold mine in Nunavut revealed.

Enhanced infrastructure investment could also be internationally recognized as part of Canada's strategy to demonstrate and assert its Arctic sovereignty. As the CNC advocates for the inclusion and participation of Indigenous communities, northern Indigenous Peoples will also play a significant role in the monitoring and surveillance of activities in their homelands. For example, the Canadian Armed Forces (CAF) already employs northern Indigenous Peoples as Canadian Rangers, who provide a military presence in remote communities and demonstrate Canadian sovereignty. In this way, Indigenous Peoples directly contribute to national security.

Infrastructure development can serve as a material expression of Canada's sovereignty in northern and Arctic areas. This creates a strong linkage between the CNC, security and sovereignty. As discussed in the paper, this connects to Indigenous sovereignty and self-determination, which the CNC recognizes and supports.

In short, this paper offers a distinct perspective by linking security and sovereignty to core issues of infrastructure development, climate and environmental change and Indigenous rights. By raising both potential benefits and security risks or vulnerabilities associated with a CNC, it reveals the need for careful, ongoing assessment by relevant rights- and stakeholders, including defence and security practitioners. The paper closes with potential research avenues that might be pursued to gain further knowledge and understanding of the security implications of a CNC, and to explore possible ways to anticipate and mitigate undesirable side effects.