

The Militarization of the Arctic.

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Interview with Rick Rozoff, the manager of the Stop NATO website and mailing list and a contributing writer to Global Research.ca

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Canada has announced that they will be conducting large-scale exercises in the Arctic. NATO also announced claims on the Arctic. What can you say about the militarization of the Arctic?

It's something that has been under way, rather in earnest, for the last four years. What I think is most noteworthy is that Canadian Defence Minister Peter MacKay, while visiting his nation's troops in Afghanistan last week, accompanied by the top military commander of Canada, Walter Natynczyk, who's by the way being touted for a top NATO post - at least Canada is promoting that - mentioned this year's now annual Canadian "sovereignty exercises" in the Arctic Ocean codenamed Operation Nanook will be the largest to date, with at least a thousand Canadian military personnel participating.

Last year's Operation Nanook was the largest to date at that time, which included 900 Canadian troops. But I think what's even more revealing than the size of the Canadian contingent was that for the first time ever - and these exercises began in 2007 and were referred to as "sovereignty exercises" - they occurred directly in response to Russia renewing territorial claims in the Arctic Ocean, particularly using the Lomonosov and the Mendeleev Ridges to sustain their claim.

Do you know what the current status of the claimed zone of the Lomonosov Ridge is?

The claims have to be adjudicated in the United Nations. These were, in some sense, all but abandoned in the waning days of the former Soviet Union by the Mikhail Gorbachev administration. But Russia, over the last six or so years, has expressed renewed interest in

the Arctic for a number of reasons.

There was a US geological survey perhaps two or three years ago that suggested that as much as 30% of hitherto undiscovered gas and 13% of oil resources exist in the Arctic Ocean.

So, there are natural resources that are involved. Of course, now, with the melting of the polar ice cap and the opening of the much-fabled Northwest Passage north of Canada, which connects the Atlantic to the Pacific Oceans and would allow nations – China is one – to circumvent the Panama Canal or even longer journeys for commercial shipping and for the shipping of energy supplies, the Arctic is taking on increasing, not only economic, but, one can argue, geostrategic importance at the moment.

Russia is simply pursuing, as any nation could and should, I suppose, its national, economic and other interests in the Arctic.

But, as a response, Canada started holding regular military exercises in the Arctic – the Operation Nanook maneuvers. And last year, as I was going to mention, for the first time ever the exercises included the participation of militaries from other countries, and those two countries were the United States and Denmark.

The United States and Denmark along with the fifth claimant to the Arctic territory, Norway, are, of course, members of the North Atlantic treaty Organization.

Russia alone of Arctic claimants is not. And it's ironic or revealing, as you will, that Denmark and the US are the only two countries that have direct territorial disputes with Canada: in the case of the US with the Beaufort Sea, which is claimed simultaneously through the US's state of Alaska and Canada's Yukon Territory; and, on the other end, the Eastern, something called Hans Island, which is claimed by both Denmark through its Greenland possession and by Canada. So that, although the only real disputes that exist are between the US and Canada and Denmark and Canada, nevertheless these three countries, three NATO members, engaged in common military exercises last August – Operation Nanook 2010 – with the clear indication that NATO countries are closing ranks against the only non-NATO claimant, which, of course, is Russia.

Are you saying that NATO has an interest in the Arctic?

Yes, most surely. And it's acknowledged it. In January 2009, in the last days of the George W. Bush Administration, the White House issued a Presidential National Security Directive, Directive 66, in relation to the Arctic.

It claimed amongst other things that not only does the US contend with Canada for part of the Beaufort Sea, but the US maintains the Northwest Passage as international waters, whereas Canada claims that it's entirely its own.

And National Security Directive #66 included amongst other things that US warships and warplanes should have free passage through the area.

And within, I believe, about couple of weeks after that, the North Atlantic Treaty Organization held an unprecedented summit in Iceland, something to the effect of Security Prospects in the High North, at which point NATO openly acknowledged having strategic

interests in the Arctic region.

This meeting was top-level. It was attended not only by the Secretary General of NATO, but by the Alliance's two top military commanders, Supreme Allied Commander Europe, who, as you know, was an American commander at that and has been at all times, but also the Supreme Allied Commander Transformation, which is based in Norfolk, Virginia, as well as the head of the NATO Military Committee.

They weren't talking about the weather. It was clear that NATO has charted out the Arctic as yet another area [of interest]. And this is quite in line with the new NATO Strategic Concept, which was adopted at the Lisbon Summit of the military bloc last November which highlighted in particular so-called energy security issues, that NATO has a self-appointed role, or mission, to protect energy security in the Caspian Sea, in the Gulf of Guinea in West Africa and indeed everywhere in the world – and certainly now in the Arctic.

For whom?

For the interests, I presume, of the leading NATO member states – the United States, France, Britain, Germany, Italy and so forth – as against the rest of the world.

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