

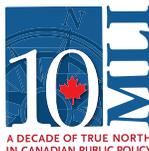
THE COLD REALITY BEHIND RUSSIA'S CHARM OFFENSIVE

Why Canada needs a realistic Arctic Policy

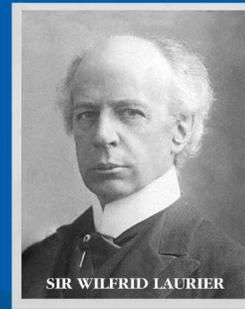
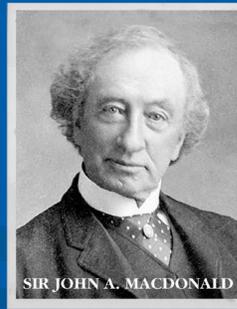
Aurel Braun and Stephen J. Blank



April 2020



A DECADE OF TRUE NORTH
IN CANADIAN PUBLIC POLICY



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Executive Summary

With the advent of global warming, the Arctic is becoming increasingly attractive due to its vast resources and navigational potential. Ideally, Arctic states would work together to ensure exploration of this region and sharing potential benefits, including the two countries with the longest Arctic coastlines – Russia and Canada. However, this ideal of cooperation cannot disregard geo-strategic, geo-economic, and ecological reality.

Moscow argues Arctic issues can be segregated from broader geo-strategic competition and from increasingly aggressive Russian behaviour elsewhere. Yet, those who buy into the Kremlin's rhetoric are likely to find themselves on a fool's errand. This paper examines several substantive concerns regarding the Russian strategy in the Arctic. A closer look at both Russia's rhetoric and activities in the region reveals the claims of Arctic military exceptionalism are entirely false.

Russia has poured resources into building substantial ground, air, and maritime forces in the Arctic.

Moscow's rhetoric at home is telling. Russia's military doctrine lists NATO at the top of external dangers and proclaims complete readiness to protect its Arctic security interests. Experts note an inflated threat perception in Russia when it comes to the Arctic: Moscow believes the West wants to deprive it of its Arctic energy resources and great power potential. One must also take into account Russia's overwhelming need for hydrocarbons, as its economy singularly depends on energy, and its exaggerated projections of Arctic traffic growth on routes that Moscow hopes to control.

Driven by economic need and paranoia, Russia has poured resources into building substantial ground, air, and maritime forces in the Arctic; its Northern and Pacific Fleets now have a nuclear component with strike capabilities as far as the US and Canada. In 2019, Russia crucially deployed its most advanced

anti-aircraft missile system, the S-400, in the Novaya Zemlya archipelago. All this marked the largest Russian military power build-up in the Arctic in decades.

Furthermore, Russia has pursued an aggressive legal policy in the Arctic, seeking, through UN channels, to claim over 1.2 million square kilometres of the Arctic sea shelf and an enormous expanse of the Arctic Ocean seabed. There is a risk of Russian unilateralism if this claim is rejected.

The perceived economic importance of the Arctic to Moscow is difficult to overstate. Russia generates at least 20 percent of its GDP from resource extraction and shipping in the Arctic (compare this with less than 1 percent of GDP for the US). The centrality of the Arctic to Russia's economy will only continue to grow. This makes it impossible to segregate Russian economic policy in the Arctic from Moscow's larger national goals.

From the environmental standpoint, the Arctic has an extremely fragile ecology. However, Russia remains a poor custodian, which is best demonstrated by attempted cover-up of recent nuclear accidents in the region. The Arctic is a major testbed for Moscow's nuclear program. A major environmental crisis in the region, hastened by Russia's military and economic activities, would deeply affect all Arctic littoral states, none more so than Canada.

While Russia's increasingly assertive Arctic policy cannot be matched by its limited economic resources, Moscow's exaggerated belief that global warming will provide vast opportunities for navigation in the Arctic has attracted a powerful believer – China.

Beijing has enormous economic resources to direct into the region and now styles itself as a “near-Arctic state.” Recognizing the potential for trade flows and transportation, China is intent on rewriting the rules that govern the Arctic. In 2019, Russian President Putin boasted of a multifaceted alliance between China and Russia in the region. The consequences of this relationship may be of particular concern for Canada.

But what should Canada's response be in the Arctic?

Ottawa has paid lip service to strengthening its military position. However, if it hopes to effectively protect its interests and sovereignty in the Arctic, it has to significantly increase its military capabilities. It needs fifth-generation aircraft and capable icebreakers. This is essential not only for military defence but also for environmental and search and rescue purposes. Its environmental policy in the region has to be coordinated properly with the US.

No Arctic country can afford to remain blind to potential geopolitical, geo-economic, and environmental threats in the region, least of all Canada. Since we will be unable to match Russia's quantitative superiority, Ottawa's should focus on achieving a qualitative edge, and take greater responsibility for our defence.

Sommaire

L'avènement des changements climatiques renforcera de plus en plus l'attrait de l'Arctique en mettant au jour ses immenses possibilités de navigation et de mise en valeur des ressources. Idéalement, les États de l'Arctique devraient tous travailler ensemble pour assurer l'exploitation du territoire et en partager les bénéfices potentiels, notamment les deux pays au littoral arctique le plus long : la Russie et le Canada. Cependant, cet idéal de coopération doit tenir compte des réalités géostratégiques, géoéconomiques et écologiques.

Moscou affirme que les questions relatives à l'Arctique peuvent être distinguées des enjeux plus généraux imposés par la concurrence géostratégique ainsi que des actions de plus en plus affirmées menées par la Russie ailleurs dans le monde. Or, les défenseurs de la rhétorique

du Kremlin risquent de mener un combat perdu d'avance. Ce document analyse plusieurs appréhensions majeures suscitées par la stratégie russe dans l'Arctique. Il ressort, au vu de la rhétorique et des activités de la Russie dans la région, que l'« exceptionnalisme militaire » revendiqué pour l'Arctique est totalement faux.

La Russie a mobilisé une énorme quantité de ressources pour puissamment renforcer ses forces terrestres, aériennes et maritimes en Arctique.

La rhétorique de Moscou sur le plan intérieur est éloquente. La doctrine militaire de la Russie classe l'OTAN au sommet des dangers extérieurs et prône la pleine disponibilité à protéger les intérêts russes en matière de sécurité dans l'Arctique. Les experts notent que la Russie exagère les menaces posées quand il s'agit de cette région : Moscou croit en effet que l'Occident souhaite priver le pays des ressources et du grand potentiel énergétiques de l'Arctique. Ajoutons à cela les besoins écrasants de la Russie en hydrocarbures – la dépendance de son économie à l'égard de l'énergie étant singulièrement importante – et les projections exagérées de croissance du trafic sur les routes arctiques qu'elle espère contrôler.

Motivée par des besoins économiques et cédant à la paranoïa, la Russie a mobilisé une énorme quantité de ressources pour puissamment renforcer ses forces terrestres, aériennes et maritimes en Arctique; ses flottes du Nord et du Pacifique sont désormais dotées d'une composante nucléaire dont la capacité de frappe peut être dirigée aussi loin que vers les États Unis et le Canada. En 2019, la Russie a déployé dans l'archipel de Nouvelle-Zemble – une opération cruciale – son système de missiles antiaériens le plus avancé, le S 400. Tout cela a marqué le plus grand renforcement de la puissance militaire russe dans l'Arctique depuis des décennies.

Qui plus est, la Russie a promptement recouru à des moyens légaux auprès des Nations Unies en vue de revendiquer un droit de propriété sur plus de 1,2 million de kilomètres carrés de plateau continental et une énorme section des fonds marins de l'océan Arctique. Une Russie déboutée risque de choisir la voie de l'unilatéralisme.

On ne pourrait sous-estimer l'importance économique de l'Arctique pour Moscou. L'extraction et le transport des ressources à travers l'Arctique comptent pour au moins 20 pour cent du PIB de la Russie (pour les États-Unis, la proportion est de seulement 1 pour cent). Le rôle central de l'Arctique pour l'économie russe ne peut que continuer à croître. Cela rend impossible de distancer la politique économique russe dans l'Arctique des objectifs nationaux plus étendus de Moscou.

D'un point de vue environnemental, l'écologie de l'Arctique est extrêmement fragile. Néanmoins, la Russie demeure un administrateur médiocre, comme le prouvent bien ses tentatives de dissimuler les récents accidents nucléaires survenus dans la région. L'Arctique est un banc d'essai majeur pour le programme nucléaire de Moscou. Toute crise environnementale importante dans la région, précipitée par les activités économiques et militaires de la Russie, serait fortement ressentie par tous les États littoraux et encore davantage par le Canada.

La politique toujours plus affirmée de la Russie à l'égard de l'Arctique est sans parallèle avec ses ressources économiques limitées, mais la croyance exagérée de Moscou voulant que le réchauffement climatique ouvre de vastes possibilités de navigation dans la région a influencé un joueur puissant : la Chine.

Beijing peut déployer d'énormes ressources économiques et se décrit maintenant comme un État « proche de l'Arctique ». Il entend établir les règles de gouvernance sur ce territoire, ayant pris conscience de ses possibilités d'échanges commerciaux et de navigation. En 2019, le président russe Vladimir Poutine s'est vanté de son alliance avec la Chine en Arctique dans différents domaines. Les conséquences de cette collaboration devraient beaucoup préoccuper le Canada.

Mais comment le Canada devrait-il intervenir dans l'Arctique?

Ottawa s'est engagé du bout des lèvres à renforcer sa position militaire. Cependant, s'il veut protéger efficacement ses intérêts et sa souveraineté dans l'Arctique, il doit accroître de manière importante ses capacités militaires. Il a besoin d'aéronefs de cinquième génération et de brise-glaces performants. C'est essentiel non seulement pour sa défense militaire, mais aussi à des fins environnementales et pour des interventions de recherche et de sauvetage. Il doit adéquatement coordonner sa politique environnementale dans la région avec celle des États Unis.

Aucun pays de l'Arctique n'a les moyens de rester indifférent aux menaces géopolitiques, géoéconomiques et environnementales qui pèsent sur la région, et encore moins le Canada. Comme nous ne pourrions égaler la supériorité de la Russie en nombre, Ottawa doit viser des objectifs qualitatifs et assumer une plus grande responsabilité en matière de défense.

Introduction

The Arctic holds enormous resources and dramatic new navigational potential, particularly with the advent of global warming. Ideally, Arctic nations would cooperate and work together to ensure that the rules for exploiting the potential of this vast region work for all Arctic nations. It would certainly be desirable, thus, for us to put aside our differences and work together for the greater good. Some would even have us believe that it is possible to segregate Arctic issues from broader geostrategic competition between nations, and from conflicts in other parts of the world. In fact, Russia's charm offensive is meant to persuade us to accept both the possibilities and the logic of such segregation.

Cooperation is not only normative but, one would wish, attainable and pragmatic. And no countries likely have a greater interest in the potential benefits of cooperation in this region than the two states that have by far the longest Arctic coastlines – first, Russia and, second, Canada. This is not to belittle the interest of other states, from the US to Norway. But for Canadians and Russians, the North is a central part of their national identity, and for Moscow in particular, it is deemed pivotal to the country's future.

Yet the ideal of cooperation needs to face geostrategic, geo-economic, and environmental/ecological reality. It is vital to distinguish rhetoric from policy and declaratory statements from actions. The desirability of cooperation remains, but it should not impede a realistic assessment of several substantive concerns that will be outlined in this paper.

On the positive side, it is crucial to recognize from the start (including in the Arctic) that there is no new global Cold War. The Soviet Union has disintegrated, and Russia has a population of only 143 million (CIA 2020a), a one-dimensional, energy-dependent economy, and a GDP that is less than one-eighth of that of the US (at the official exchange rate; CEIC 2020; CIA 2020a, 2020b). Today's Russia is not a superpower; it is not going to become one (with the sole exception of its nuclear arsenal), and it is not governed by a universalistic ideology that competes globally with democracy. In short, Russia is not the primary global challenger to the US and Canada.

The Russian Charm Offensive

When it comes to the Arctic, the Russian government has made strenuous efforts to persuade the Arctic states, including Canada, of a type of Arctic exceptionalism – whereby this region can be separated from all the other areas of clearly aggressive Russian behaviour. Moscow has been relentless in pushing the message that, for instance, its aggressive acts against Ukraine – including the illegal occupation and annexation of Crimea in 2014 – can be separated from its actions in the Baltic and the Arctic, and its pressure on the Baltic states can, in turn, be segregated from what it proclaims to be a fully cooperative policy in the Arctic.

As part of a charm campaign, President Vladimir Putin and the Kremlin, in dulcet tones, have been singing about peace and cooperation in the Arctic. President Putin declared that Russia is fully committed to peace in the Arctic and that “there is no place for geopolitical games of

military alliances” in the region (RIA 2016). Further, at the International Arctic Forum in St. Petersburg in 2019, Putin not only emphasized the common interest in the Arctic that Russia and the US had but stated that he had no sense of any “special military tension,” and if anything, he added, the aviation activities of Russia were lower in the Arctic by order of magnitude than those of NATO countries. Moscow’s key goal, in this Kremlin narrative, is focused on helping its neighbours drastically increase shipments along newly accessible Arctic Sea routes (Galperovich 2019).

Unfortunately, as detailed in a subsequent section, it is hard to imagine a greater gulf between Russian rhetoric and practice. Nonetheless, this Russian approach of calling for a geopolitical and geostrategic “kumbaya” has proven to be seductive for some. This should not be entirely surprising. That Western policy-makers and scholars would desire negotiations and cooperation over confrontation is both natural and desirable. In certain ways, we in the West are hardwired culturally to seek negotiations, and this is most commendable because conflict is so unpredictable and potentially devastating. It is not entirely unexpected then that some might go as far as to describe the Arctic (even in 2019) as “presently a peaceful and co-operative region” (Byers and Covey 2019) or even to oddly claim that “Russia owns half the Arctic and has no interest in acquiring more” (ibid.). Some have even interpreted Russia’s resumed air patrols with their long-range Tu-95 bombers in the Arctic as just routine patrols (Sevunts 2017).

Clearly, Russia has legitimate national interests and security concerns in the region, due not least to the fact that it has the longest coastline in the Arctic. Search and rescue cooperation, as well as Aboriginal cultural links, is important and beneficial in the Arctic. It is also vital not to invent or wrongly magnify Russian threats.

At the same time, however, no country bordering the Arctic can afford to disregard such possible threats, least of all Canada. In fact, under the current government, Ottawa has committed itself to a strategy that is reflected in the slogan “Strong, Secure and Engaged” (Canada 2019), and this certainly is meant to extend to the Arctic. Consequently, assessments or policies that exclusively emphasize Arctic cooperation, while remaining largely blind to geopolitical, geostrategic, and geo-economic/environmental threats, are extraordinarily problematic and are belied by the facts.

The Cold Reality

Refuting Moscow’s Arctic exceptionalism

While Russia may have assiduously cultivated the notion of Arctic exceptionalism, essentially seeking to segregate its aggressive actions elsewhere from its peaceful Arctic proclamations, those who buy into the Kremlin’s declaratory statements are likely to find themselves on a fool’s errand. In fact, back in 2015, the Norwegian Foreign Minister Borge Brende wisely cautioned that the Arctic could not be compartmentalized from broader geopolitical concerns (Auerswald and Anderson 2019). This was despite strenuous Russian efforts to camouflage reality for its policies, somehow seemingly believing that proclamations that they make in Russian are impenetrable to Western analysts.

Yet, by 2014, we were well aware that Russia's military doctrine placed NATO at the top of the list of external dangers and proclaimed Moscow's complete readiness to protect its Arctic security interests (Bartosh 2016). Writing in 2019, a veteran analyst of Russia's strategic objectives in the Arctic commented on the "astounding amount of exaggeration and inflated threat assessment" in Russia when it comes to the Arctic (Baev 2019). Moreover, this hyperbolic threat assessment is tied to Russia's overwhelming need for hydrocarbons, given its singularly energy-dependent economy (for a large state), unrealistic expectations of recoverable energy, and its seemingly overhyped projections of Arctic traffic growth on routes that Moscow hopes to control (ibid.; Russia 2016). It is also driven by the Kremlin's desire to divert the population's attention away from a plethora of domestic problems and focus instead on prospective international gains and purported foreign threats.

*Russia's military
doctrine placed NATO
at the top of the list
of external dangers.*

A closer examination of Russia's military activities in the Arctic, in fact, shows that the new assertions of Arctic military exceptionalism are entirely false. In 2017, Moscow had new weapons with advanced missiles ready for use in the Arctic and Russia's Northern Fleet practiced live-fire missile drills in the area.

In 2018, the commander of the Russian Northern Fleet declared that an Arctic-motorized rifle brigade and air defence units would keep watch on the islands of the Arctic Ocean and President Putin emphasized the Arctic's importance for Moscow and Russia's cutting-edge missile-launch and detection systems in the region. Also that year, Russia's National Guard conducted exercises in the Arctic on Russian-owned Franz

Josef Land, deployed a new generation of Tor-M2 missile systems together with advanced anti-ship missiles, and, according to *Izvestia*, Russia was deploying two squadrons of MiG-31 fighter jets at Murmansk region airbase in the Arctic (Galperovich 2019).

Crucially in 2019, Russia also deployed its most advanced anti-aircraft missile system, the S-400, in the Novaya Zemlya archipelago in the Arctic (Staalesen 2019). This system is capable of intercepting not only aircraft but ballistic missiles as well, and Russia declared that this potent system would be deployed to cover the entire region, with the Northern Fleet commander specifically stating that it would "... create an air defense shield over the Russian part of the Arctic" (ibid.). All this has been part of the largest military build-up of Russian military power in the Arctic in recent decades. So much for this being a zone of cooperation.

Senior US military officials have raised concerns about this build-up on numerous occasions. In 2018, US Admiral Harry Harris, commander of US Pacific Command, noted the massive Russian military build-up in the High North, when he remarked that Moscow "has more bases North of the Arctic Circle than all other countries combined and is building more with distinctly military capabilities" (Humpert 2018).

This was followed in February 2019, when US General Terrence O'Shaughnessy – double-hatted as the commander of NORAD and US Northern Command – pointed to recent confron-

tations between Canadian and US fighter jets and Russian Tu-160 Blackjack bombers close to the North American coastline and urged Canada and the US to do more in the face of provocative Russian acts and statements (CBC 2019). According to O’Shaughnessy, “we face a more competitive and dangerous international security environment today than we have in generations” (ibid.). Coincidentally, just a day earlier, Norway’s director of Intelligence Services reported that 11 advanced Russian fighter jets conducted a large-scale mock attack on a northern Norwegian radar station in 2018 (ibid.).

That the US and European states have begun to recognize Russia’s increased militarization of the Arctic has been encouraging. Scholars like Robert Huebert have welcomed the fact that “the West sees through Russia’s narrative of Arctic cooperation and exceptionalism” (Humpert 2018). Such recognition is an important first step, but Canada and the US have a long way to go to effectively counter Russia’s aggressive military expansionism in the Arctic.

Russia’s territorial claims

In the realm of international law, we need to recognize claims that Russia is not seeking additional territory in the Arctic are entirely mistaken. In fact, Russia has pursued an aggressive legal policy in the Arctic, claiming vast areas of the Arctic by asserting sovereignty over the Lomonosov and Mendeleev Ridges. In August 2015, Russia boldly resubmitted a claim to the UN Commission on the Limits of the Continental Shelf (CLCS) for a huge portion of the Arctic based on what it asserts to be a right to the continental shelf based on those ridges (TASS 2017). All told, this claim encompasses more than 1.2 million square kilometres of Arctic sea shelf that would extend more than 650 kilometres from the shore (Isachenkov 2015). Shortly thereafter, as part of this effort, Russia submitted a claim for an enormous expanse of the Arctic Ocean seabed under the *UN Convention on the Law of the Sea* (UNCLOS; Kramer 2016)¹. Canada has justifiably rejected the Russian claim to the Lomonosov and Mendeleev Ridges, but there is a risk of Russian unilateralism if this claim is rejected at the UN (Baev 2019).

Geo-economic importance of the Arctic

Geo-economic issues are also crucial in assessing Russia’s true attitude towards confrontation and cooperation in the Arctic. It would be difficult to overstate the perceived economic importance of the Arctic to Russia; no other country in the region comes close to generating as much GDP from the region as Russia has done and plans to do in the future. By way of comparison, whereas Russia derives at least 20 percent of its GDP from resource extraction and shipping in the Arctic, the US generates less than 1 percent of its GDP from the area (Galperovich 2019). The fact that the Russian government has made strenuous efforts to fully integrate Arctic energy extraction and navigation into its whole economic fabric means that there is no reasonable way to segregate Russian economic and ecological policy in the Arctic from Moscow’s larger national goals.

The Arctic energy resource potential may be large and indeed significant for Russian national economic goals. However, for a variety of reasons, not least Moscow’s inability and unwillingness to diversify its economy, the Kremlin has continually exaggerated the hydrocarbon potential of the region and the attendant navigation possibilities (Baev 2019). Notwithstanding some encouraging signs, such as the August 2017 navigation of an LNG (liquefied natural gas) vessel from Norway to South Korea via the Northern Sea Route without an icebreaker escort, the volume of transit along the route has remained rather small for now (ibid.). Yet Russia continues to maintain a significantly exaggerated belief that global warming will

provide vast opportunities for a drastic change in navigation patterns – by allowing the Northern Sea Route to reduce the time and distance for shipments of goods between Europe, North America, and the Far East. As a result, Moscow has placed enormous emphasis on controlling this route and investing in energy extraction in the region. Perceptions and expectations are prime in Moscow, and, in some ways, this has also been contagious when it comes to Russia's partnership with China. This definitely has attracted China's attention and support for the Kremlin. And that relationship, as we will see, is vital to understanding Russia's policies and ambitions in the Arctic.

Even though Moscow is exaggerating, for domestic reasons, the energy and navigation potential in the Arctic, the actual resources are already very substantial. This is reflected in the YAMAL LNG project, where Moscow has invested tens of billions of dollars in an Arctic enterprise that is expected to generate 16.5 billion tons of LNG when it reaches full capacity by 2021 (Wallace 2019). Additionally, as a reflection of Moscow's intention to integrate its Arctic economic activity with its overall geo-economic plans, it also completed the Bovanenkovo-Ukhta energy pipeline that feeds directly into the Nord Stream energy system, which supplies significant amounts of natural gas to Germany. Of note, this has controversially increased the latter's dependence on Russia (*ibid.*). Ultimately, the centrality of the Arctic to Russia's economy, which already produces about 20 percent of its GDP, will only grow over time.

Ecological implications

Russia's economic ambitions also carry deep ecological implications. The Arctic has an extremely fragile ecology where energy spills would make catastrophic energy accidents in the Gulf of Mexico appear to be relatively minor by comparison. Unfortunately, like its Soviet predecessor, Russia itself has proven to be a very poor custodian of the environment – as revealed by the vast amount of pollution deep in parts of the Russian landmass.

Russia's military and economic activities are already hastening the advent of a major environmental crisis that could easily transcend Russia's borders. The possibilities for energy extraction and transportation accidents in the Arctic can only multiply as Russia rapidly increases its efforts to explore and ship in this ecologically fragile region, and this would deeply affect all of the Arctic littoral states, none more so than Canada, which possesses, as noted, the second-longest Arctic coastline.

Earlier in 2019, we saw nuclear accidents in the Arctic that Russia, true to its past traditions, strove to cover up from its own people no less than from the world (Kramer 2019). As the recent environmental disasters connected with Russia's nuclear program show, the Arctic is a major testbed for Moscow's nuclear program. Not only did the accidents that occurred in mid-2019 put the health (if not survival) of local residents at risk, but we can also easily imagine large-scale disasters on the scale of Chernobyl from accidents involved in the handling of these weapons. Moreover, Russia's bureaucracy has shown itself unwilling and unprepared to face these risks squarely, competently, and honestly (Kramer 2016). Given the links among military and environmental and political, it is entirely possible that war or environmental disaster could, as Russian writers themselves acknowledge, arise from nuclear accidents (Bermant 2016).

Equally worrisome, Moscow apparently views climate change as something positive that would warm its cold cities and dramatically facilitate Arctic navigation and exploration. Consequently, Moscow seems to ignore the many reports from Russian scientists that describe

how climate change threatens Russia's Arctic communities. Indeed, climate change could create large-scale havoc there and generate huge risks, again involving nuclear power if not weapons (Blank and Kim, forthcoming). Yet Moscow appears indifferent to and unwilling to act decisively against it (Buckholz 2016). These looming disasters can potentially affect other Arctic states like Canada or Russia's neighbours.

Any attempt by the Kremlin to deal with the above issues, however, would be constrained by Russia's limited economic resources. Moscow needs outside help, especially after Western sanctions were imposed following Russia's illegal annexation of Crimea in 2014. China has readily obliged, given its vast appetite for energy and its Belt and Road Initiative. In its partnership with Russia, China sees the opportunity for the creation of a maritime "Silk Road." Naturally, given the great disparity in economic size, it is more the case of a "giant panda" partnering with a "small bear" in the Arctic region, but Moscow still has certain local advantages. This partnership then is crucial to understanding the challenges, if not threats, that Russia poses to Canada, and to North America in general, in the Arctic.

The Russia-China Tandem

Russia's focus remains the strategic domination of the Arctic. Moscow views the Arctic as a treasure trove of natural resources for its future economy, an arena where it can and therefore must display superior military power against the West, and a "Mecca" whose exploitation and domination entails the regeneration of Russia's quasi-sacred national identity (Tharoor 2015).

Consistent with the paranoid threat assessment that governs Russian security policy, Moscow believes that the West wants to seize these energy resources and deprive Russia of its great power potential (Russia 2009², 2014, 2015a, 2015b). In the light of its overall belief that the West is at war with it, not only has Russia poured resources into building substantial conventional ground, air, air defence, and maritime forces in the Arctic, it has also strengthened the Northern and Pacific Fleets' role as a nuclear navy with strike capabilities as far as the US and Canada. Its fleet and submarines also recently concluded an exercise where they surged into the North Atlantic to threaten the Allied Sea Lanes of Communications (SLOC) and the transatlantic cables that carry vital information across the ocean (Rogoway 2019). The threat to Canada on both its Atlantic and Pacific shores is clear from both this build-up and Russian exercises that invariably also have a nuclear component, especially as all of Moscow's new missiles are dual-use in nature (Blank 2018).

In October 2019, Vladimir Putin proclaimed the existence of a multifaceted alliance between China and Russia (Russia 2019; TASS 2019). The Arctic consequences of this relationship may be of particular concern for Canada. China is simultaneously taking an ever more rapidly growing interest in the region, fully recognizing both the Arctic's navigational potentials and the possibility of revolutionary change in trade flows and transportation. China already styles itself as a "near-Arctic state" and is intent on writing the rules that govern the Arctic (Brady 2017; China 2018; Wong 2018). Beijing is investing heavily in promoting these developments while also appreciating that it must currently work with Russia and within Moscow's strategic goals to achieve its own aims (Wishnick 2019).

Whereas Russia's entire northern coast adjoins the Arctic Ocean, since 2018, China has striven to make good on its claim to be an Arctic military and commercial power by substantial investments in icebreakers and nuclear-powered submarines that can patrol the Arctic and increasing intercontinental trade through the Arctic (ibid.). Indeed, with Russia's assent, Beijing could potentially deploy one of its SSBNs to the Arctic from where it could strike either Canada or the US (McLaughlin and Finnegan 2019). Obviously, these commercial, military, and environmental threats to Canada and its allies make up only a part of the larger Sino-Russian alliance proclaimed by Putin. But in the Arctic, where Canada has particularly vital concerns, these developments have especially strong negative connotations.

China has striven to make good on its claim to be an Arctic military and commercial power.

We consequently have a situation where the world is facing an increasingly assertive and even aggressive Russia. Indeed, since 2015 it has steadily provoked Western militaries by aggressive probes in or from the Arctic and elsewhere that could easily lead to a major disaster (Bermant 2016). Yet Russia has limited economic resources with which to focus on the Arctic. China, on the other hand, has enormous economic resources, has invested heavily in various parts of the world, and now aims to become heavily involved in the Arctic. The combination of Russia, with great military power and potential, with China, which possesses enormous economic resources and equivalent, if not even greater, military potential, is an ominous new factor for democracies that face the Arctic and for Canada in particular.

As noted earlier, Moscow has claimed an enormous expanse of territory in the Arctic as part of its continental shelf under UNCLOS. If the UN recognizes this claim, it is more than likely that Russia will either impose high tariffs on all Arctic trade through the Northern Sea Route above its territory or even close it off altogether to foreign traffic. It has done so in regard to the Sea of Okhotsk that the UN recognized as part of its continental shelf in 2014. And that decision clearly serves as a precedent for Moscow (Blank 2017).

Russia's attempts to close off the Black Sea and to declare the Sea of Azov and the adjoining Kerch Strait as inland waters betray its contempt for UNCLOS, even though it is a member, and for smaller states' sovereignty. Thus, its actions represent a dangerous threat to all major maritime trading powers like Canada. Moreover, Russia apparently serves as an example or precedent for other states. Iran has periodically interfered with freedom of navigation in the Straits of Hormuz, and Turkey has forcibly begun drilling for gas in Cyprus' EEZ (economic exclusion zone) granted to the latter under UNCLOS. Ankara claims it is not a member of UNCLOS and that Cyprus is not a state. But these strikes that have now occurred with impunity threaten the principle of freedom of the seas and follow Moscow's example.

China and Russia may both have learned from each other regarding these issues. The greatest example of such attacks on this principle of freedom of the seas is, of course, China's long-standing and well-known efforts to oust foreign navies and littoral states from the South China Sea. Paradoxically it opposes Russian efforts to tax foreign ships in the Northern Sea Route or even close it to foreign vessels. Nevertheless, despite their contradictory positions regarding the Arc-

tic and the South China Sea, China and Russia can, if successful, establish regimes that threaten freedom of the sea and Western security at the same time given their power (Nankivell 2017).

Beyond these aggressive and threatening policies, both Moscow and Beijing believe that they are not bound by law, either domestic or international, and need not account to anyone for their actions since that represents an abridgment of their sovereignty, which they claim is supreme and above any domestic or foreign law. They will retreat only in the face of superior power and the principle of expediency. Moscow's contempt for the treaties it has signed is starkly evident from its aggression against Ukraine, which broke five solemn treaties signed between 1991 and 2010. Likewise, it has cold-bloodedly violated the *Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces (INF) Treaty*, all the while denying that it has done so even as we find still new examples of its violating that treaty (Pan Pacific Agency 2019). In September 2019, the navy confirmed that it had launched the Oniks supersonic cruise missile from the Bastion ground-launched cruise missile system at targets in Alaska (i.e., Arctic targets) after it had been deployed for about ten years. The INF accountable range is clearly more than 600 kilometres because the range is measured under INF to fuel exhaustion. Therefore, the deployment of this missile reveals another INF Treaty violation, and one we have not fully grasped (Blank 2019).

China's contempt for smaller powers and the law is also apparent from its long-standing behaviour in regard to the South China Sea and its refusal to abide by the 2016 decision of the Hague-based Permanent Court of Arbitration, which denied China's vaunted "nine-dash line" claim to the waters of that sea, its claims on the territorial waters around many island features, and its justifications for building artificial islands. Thus, both Moscow and Beijing have not only threatened Western and Canadian interests on both sides of the Arctic, but they have also flaunted their unilateralism and aggressiveness with regard to issues that directly relate to major Arctic concerns. Such systematic behaviour cannot but alarm responsible policy-makers in North America, Europe, and Asia.

Reality and Response

At the biannual meeting of the Arctic Council in 2019, US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo warned about Russian and Chinese activities and intentions in the Arctic (Auerswald and Anderson 2019). In light of Russia's re-militarization of the Arctic and its numerous infringements in the airspace and territorial waters of Arctic Council members, it would be expected that Canada would strengthen its ability to protect the country's sovereignty in the North. The deployment of the S-400 air defence system by Russia in the Arctic surely should be viewed as a vivid warning sign. Canada, moreover, would need to respond to geostrategic as well as geo-economic and environmental threats in the region.

In military terms, Canada's response so far has been tepid at best. The touted defence expenditure increases for the Canadian forces will still fall well short of the 2 percent GDP guideline that was laid out at the 2014 Wales NATO summit (Browne 2019). Canada's 2019 military budget, which provides 700 million dollars over the next ten years for education and infrastructure in the Arctic, makes little mention of significant military expenditures in the region (Sevunts 2019). Canada will need to spend substantial sums on airpower, land forces, capable icebreakers, and infrastructure. Though Prime Minister Trudeau's 2017 defence policy pledged to increase Canadian military spending by 70 percent over the coming decade (ibid.), hard power capability

increases have so far been limited. Whereas the sizable increase of funding for veterans and pensions is undoubtedly welcome, the Wales guideline has also stipulated that 20 percent of the defence expenditures should be on equipment. The commitment to purchase desperately needed fighter aircraft to replace the antiquated F-18s, for instance, has yet to materialize.

As Canada cannot match Russia in quantity, it is vital that it should seek a qualitative advantage. Especially in light of the deployment of Russia's highly potent S-400 system in the Arctic, Canada needs a fifth-generation aircraft with stealth capability as well as the ability to integrate into a wider system. One can only hope that the Liberal government will not reject the purchase of such aircraft already ordered by partners (Britain, Norway, Denmark, and the US) for partisan political reasons.

The other area where Canada needs to step up militarily is in the acquisition of capable icebreakers. This is essential not only for military defence but also for environmental and search and rescue purposes. Russia operates the world's largest fleet of icebreakers with 40 icebreakers, ten of which are nuclear-powered (Wallace 2019). By contrast, Canada has only seven icebreakers, two of which generate 38,000 hp (horsepower) and are nominally considered heavy (Montgomery 2019). Compare that with Russia, which operates five nuclear-powered ships that have

50,000 to 75,000 hp, five in the works with 30,000 hp, and one gigantic vessel that is meant to have 160,000 hp (ibid.). It should also be noteworthy that Russia has plans for two military icebreakers that will be heavily armed with missiles and artillery (ibid.). Meanwhile, the US itself has only two heavy icebreakers, with plans of three additional ones (ibid.).

In May 2019, Prime Minister Trudeau did announce a substantial investment to renew the coast guard fleet, which would include two new Arctic and Offshore Patrol ships, but these are not heavy icebreakers (Vavasseur 2019). The one heavy icebreaker that is supposed to replace the aged *Louis St. Laurent* (in service since 1969), the Canadian Coast Guard vessel *John G. Diefenbaker*, has been put off ever further into the future (Berthiaume 2019).

Strangely, in fact, the current government

apparently has decided to move the construction of the *Diefenbaker* from the Seaspan shipyard in Vancouver, which was tapped to build it back in 2011, to the Davie shipyard in Quebec (ibid.). Consequently, the original date of the deployment of the *Diefenbaker* in 2017 is now being pushed much further into the 2020s, with no definite date for completion (ibid.).

To be sure, in terms of infrastructure, Canada has put some more money into building stronger Arctic and Northern communities, but the effort is quite limited (Sevunts 2019). For example, the 2019 federal budget set aside only \$21.8 million over five years for an upgrade to the Eureka weather station on Ellesmere Island, Nunavut (ibid.). Canada has no all-weather roads in the McKenzie Valley or in the key part of the Northwest Territories, though the road has been completed to the Arctic coast at Tuktoyaktuk in the Northwest Territories (Weber 2019).

Canada needs a fifth-generation aircraft with stealth capability as well as the ability to integrate into a wider system.

In terms of geo-economics and environmental protection, Canada has also done little to realistically address Russian challenges and potential opportunities. In December 2016, shortly after the election of US President Trump, Prime Minister Trudeau rushed to coordinate with outgoing Obama administration and announced that both countries were banning oil and gas development in Northern waters (in the case of Canada for a five-year period, and the US indefinitely; Huebert 2017). This may indeed have been an attractive move for Canada from an environmental perspective, provided that it could be coordinated properly with our most important ally. Unfortunately, and not in the least surprisingly, in April 2017, President Trump explicitly reversed Obama's ban on Arctic energy exploration and the US Department of the Interior announced plans to offer offshore leases for the Arctic oil and gas exploration (Wallace 2019).

As a result, Canada is pursuing a policy that is not only different from Russia's – and this may be indeed environmentally commendable, even if it forgoes certain possible economic opportunities – but is also at odds with the policies of the current US administration. This makes enforcement and the protection of the environment in the region considerably more difficult. Again, this is hardly to suggest that Canada should slavishly follow American policy and forego environmental responsibility, but it would be prudent for Canada not to act unilaterally.

Conclusion

Canada has certainly paid lip service to strengthening its military position in the Arctic and has even taken some rather small steps forward. But as noted, overall, what it has done so far remains quite inadequate. The current government is continuing to underspend militarily, is not moving quickly enough on bringing in capable icebreakers into the Arctic, and has yet to purchase the advanced aircraft that would give it a qualitative edge to protect Arctic sovereignty. Certainly, as a member of both NATO and NORAD, Canada has important alliance support, but this can diminish not only with an undiplomatically demanding Trump administration but also with successor ones as allies are expected to take greater responsibility for their own defence.

Of course, Canada is not the only country that has problems in dealing with a difficult Trump administration. No country, however, is so dependent on the US – whether we are talking about political, military, economic, or ecological protection – as is Canada. It makes little sense, therefore, to get into gratuitous disputes or differences with the Trump administration. The impetus for Canada to make greater military contributions in the Arctic should be recognized as arising primarily from the need to protect our national interests. Canada would be wise to think along the whole spectrum of geostrategic, geo-economic, and environmental concerns.

Irrespective of who wins the 2020 US presidential election, the next administration will expect Canada to do more for its own defence. It would also be prudent for Ottawa to consider the possibility that President Trump himself might be re-elected. Canada has been expending a great deal of energy under the current government in its efforts to boost its soft power, including Ottawa's attempt to gain a seat on the UN Security Council. There is certainly nothing wrong with a country like Canada trying to grow its soft power capabilities, but there must be a clear recognition that soft power is invariably intertwined with hard power.

If Canada is to effectively address its geostrategic, geo-economic, and environmental concerns in the Arctic, it has to significantly boost its actual military capabilities. It will need to substantially boost its defence expenditures, and it would be wise to focus on achieving a qualitative edge, especially when it comes to airpower, since Canada will not be able to match Russia's quantitative superiority. Creative rhetoric or clever accounting interpretations cannot substitute for real, significantly enhanced defence expenditures. A militarily more capable Canada would also be in a better position to more effectively cooperate with its democratic allies and partners in the Arctic. Consequently, Canada could do itself a great deal of good by taking greater responsibility for its own defence.

About the Authors



Aurel Braun is a Professor of International Relations and Political Science at the University of Toronto. He was recently a Visiting Professor in the Department of Government at Harvard University for three years (2012-2015). Currently he is a Center Associate of the Davis Center at Harvard University. Also, he is a senior member of the Centre for Eurasian, Russian and East European Studies, and a Fellow and a Senator of Trinity College at the University of Toronto. Professor Braun has twice been appointed a Visiting Scholar at the Hoover Institution, Stanford University. In March 2009, the Canadian Federal Cabinet via a Governor-in-Council appointment made Professor Braun the Chairman of the Board of Directors of the International Centre for Human Rights and Democratic Development (Rights & Democracy) for a three-year term. In December 2012 Professor Braun was awarded

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Professor Braun has published extensively on communist affairs and strategic studies with a special focus on the problems of the transformation of the socialist systems in the former Soviet Union and in Eastern Europe. He is also a specialist in international law. He is the author and/or editor of several books. These include: *NATO-Russia Relations in the 21st Century* (Routledge, UK and worldwide, 2008); *Dilemmas of Transition* (Boulder Co. and London, U.K., Fall 1999); *The Extreme Right: Freedom and Security At Risk* (Westview Press, Boulder, CO and London, UK, 1997); *The Soviet-East European Relationship in the Gorbachev Era: The Prospects for Adaptation* (Westview Press, Boulder, CO and London, UK, 1990); *The Middle East in Global Strategy* (Westview Press, Boulder CO & London and Mansell Publishing, London, UK, 1987); *Small State Security in the Balkans* (Macmillan, London, UK, 1983); *Ceausescu: The Problems of Power* (Canadian Institute of International Affairs, Toronto, 1980); *Romanian Foreign Policy Since 1965: The Political and Military Limits of Autonomy* (Praeger, NY, 1978). Professor Braun has written more than 50 scholarly articles and has contributed more than two dozen chapters to collections of scholarly works. The scholarly journals include *Orbis*, *Problems of Communism*, *Millennium*, *International Journal*, *American Political Science Review*, *Europe's World* and *Sudosteuroopa*. Many of his articles have been translated and published in Japan. His project on "The Russian Diaspora and the Prospect for Large-Scale Violence" was published by The Council on Foreign Relations, NY. He is currently writing a book based on the CFR project. He is also writing a book on *Russia, the West and Arctic Security*.



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PA: Strategic Studies Institute, U.S. Army War College, 2005). He is currently completing a book entitled *Light From the East: Russia's Quest for Great Power Status in Asia* to be published in 2014 by Ashgate. Dr. Blank is also the author of *The Sorcerer as Apprentice: Stalin's Commissariat of Nationalities* (Greenwood, 1994); and the co-editor of *The Soviet Military and the Future* (Greenwood, 1992).

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Endnotes

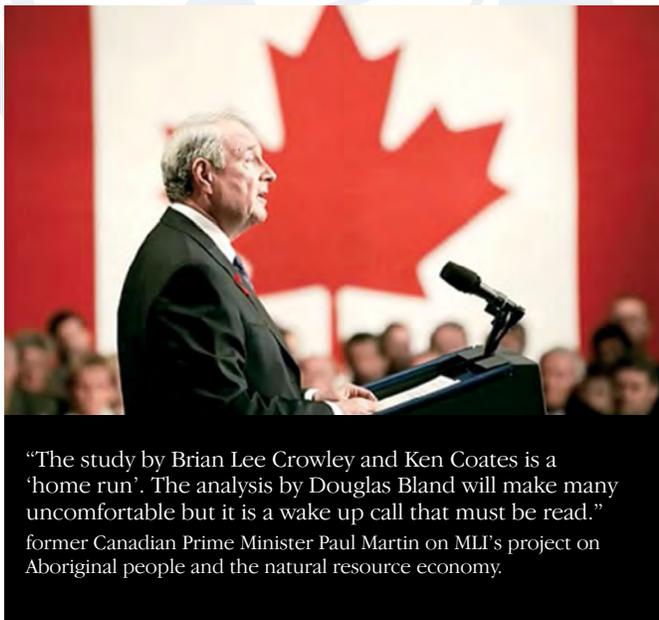
- 1 This is not to deny the fact that Canada has also pursued significant claims in the Arctic with its own UNCLOS submission, though the context around each country's claims remains quite distinct.
- 2 In English, available from *FBIS SOV*, May 15, 2009, in a translation from the Security Council website.



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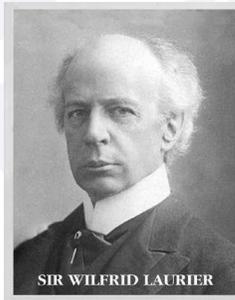
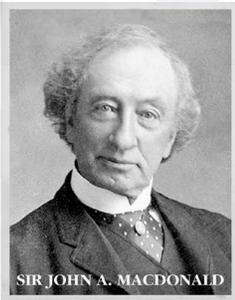
About the Macdonald-Laurier Institute

What Do We Do?

When you change how people think, you change what they want and how they act. That is why thought leadership is essential in every field. At MLI, we strip away the complexity that makes policy issues unintelligible and present them in a way that leads to action, to better quality policy decisions, to more effective government, and to a more focused pursuit of the national interest of all Canadians. MLI is the only non-partisan, independent national public policy think tank based in Ottawa that focuses on the full range of issues that fall under the jurisdiction of the federal government.

What Is in a Name?

The Macdonald-Laurier Institute exists not merely to burnish the splendid legacy of two towering figures in Canadian history – Sir John A. Macdonald and Sir Wilfrid Laurier – but to renew that legacy. A Tory and a Grit, an English speaker and a French speaker – these two men represent the very best of Canada's fine political tradition. As prime minister, each championed the values that led to Canada assuming her place as one of the world's leading democracies. We will continue to vigorously uphold these values, the cornerstones of our nation.



Working for a Better Canada

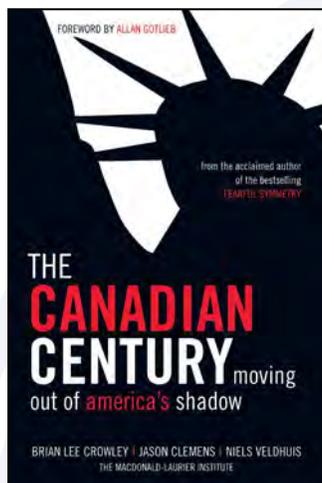
Good policy doesn't just happen; it requires good ideas, hard work, and being in the right place at the right time. In other words, it requires MLI. We pride ourselves on independence, and accept no funding from the government for our research. If you value our work and if you believe in the possibility of a better Canada, consider making a tax-deductible donation. The Macdonald-Laurier Institute is a registered charity.

Our Issues

The Institute undertakes an impressive program of thought leadership on public policy. Some of the issues we have tackled recently include:

- Aboriginal people and the management of our natural resources;
- Making Canada's justice system more fair and efficient;
- Defending Canada's innovators and creators;
- Controlling government debt at all levels;
- Advancing Canada's interests abroad;
- Ottawa's regulation of foreign investment; and
- How to fix Canadian health care.

Macdonald-Laurier Institute Publications



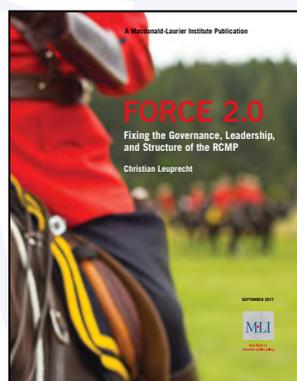
Winner of the Sir Antony Fisher International Memorial Award BEST THINK TANK BOOK IN 2011, as awarded by the Atlas Economic Research Foundation.

The Canadian Century
By Brian Lee Crowley,
Jason Clemens, and Niels Veldhuis

Do you want to be first to hear about new policy initiatives? Get the inside scoop on upcoming events?

Visit our website www.MacdonaldLaurier.ca and sign up for our newsletter.

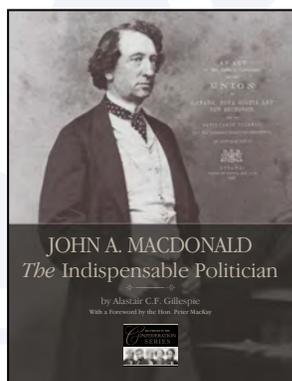
RESEARCH PAPERS



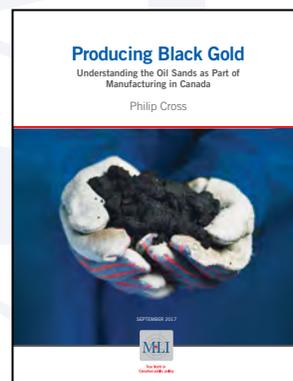
Force 2.0
Christian Leuprecht



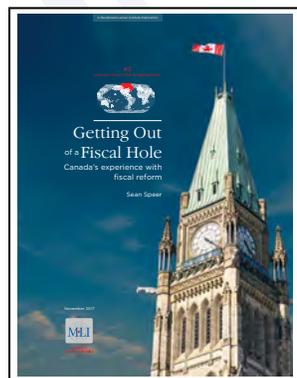
The Unkindest Cut
Wayne Critchley and
Richard C. Owens



**John A. Macdonald:
The Indispensable
Politician**
Alastair C.F. Gillespie



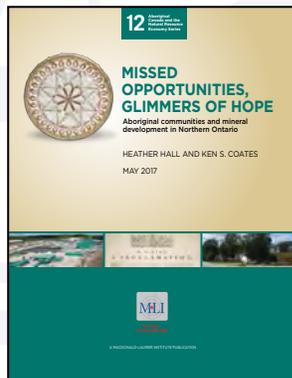
Producing Black Gold
Philip Cross



**Getting Out of a Fiscal
Hole**
Sean Speer



Getting the Big Picture
Bram Noble



**Missed Opportunities,
Glimmers of Hope**
Heather Hall and
Ken S. Coates



Running Out of Time
Brian Ferguson, Sean Speer,
and Ariel Freeman-Fawcett



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What people are saying about the Macdonald-Laurier Institute

In five short years, the institute has established itself as a steady source of high-quality research and thoughtful policy analysis here in our nation's capital. Inspired by Canada's deep-rooted intellectual tradition of ordered liberty – as exemplified by Macdonald and Laurier – the institute is making unique contributions to federal public policy and discourse. Please accept my best wishes for a memorable anniversary celebration and continued success.

THE RIGHT HONOURABLE STEPHEN HARPER

The Macdonald-Laurier Institute is an important source of fact and opinion for so many, including me. Everything they tackle is accomplished in great depth and furthers the public policy debate in Canada. Happy Anniversary, this is but the beginning.

THE RIGHT HONOURABLE PAUL MARTIN

In its mere five years of existence, the Macdonald-Laurier Institute, under the erudite Brian Lee Crowley's vibrant leadership, has, through its various publications and public events, forged a reputation for brilliance and originality in areas of vital concern to Canadians: from all aspects of the economy to health care reform, aboriginal affairs, justice, and national security.

BARBARA KAY, NATIONAL POST COLUMNIST

Intelligent and informed debate contributes to a stronger, healthier and more competitive Canadian society. In five short years the Macdonald-Laurier Institute has emerged as a significant and respected voice in the shaping of public policy. On a wide range of issues important to our country's future, Brian Lee Crowley and his team are making a difference.

JOHN MANLEY, CEO COUNCIL
