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## **Needed: White paper on Great White North**

By Murray Lee

This year, the media have been flooded with news reports of the government of Canada announcing initiatives to support this country's sovereignty in the high Arctic. These have ranged from building a northern port, the construction of ice breakers, a military presence in the north to a navy capable of patrolling in Arctic waters with state of the art Corvettes. However, this piecemeal approach to a recurring national problem is not addressing the issue.

In February, this Canadian Defence Associations Institute published the Vimy Paper 2 entitled "Defence Requirements for Canada's Arctic" which was well received by numerous institutes across the country and indeed supported by a number of government ministers, senators and members of Parliament. It is suggested that although the Vimy Paper is military-centric in content, it does not go far enough in challenging the government to produce a firm national policy. Although General Manson in his summary correctly identifies the *requirements* in this debate, challenging the government to implement a cohesive Arctic policy is missing. In other words, the requirement for a White Paper on Northern Sovereignty.

The Royal United Services Institute of Nova Scotia feels the government, although repeatedly stating a commitment to Northern Sovereignty, has missed the mark. What has not developed in recent years is a cohesive policy that, no matter which political party is in power, is a *de facto* blueprint to follow for years to come. RUSI Nova Scotia has written to many influential parliamentarians and they all support the notion of Northern Sovereignty. What is missing is a central department responsible for the development of a Northern Sovereignty policy. Who has the lead? There are standing committees; Canada participates in the Arctic Council established by Canada in 1996; and under subsection 23(1) of the Oceans Act, the Department of Foreign Affairs (DFAIT) is the lead federal department on issues of national sovereignty with respect to bodies of water. So what? Who has the lead? Should it be the Department of Transport, Foreign Affairs, National Defence (DND), Industry Trade and Commerce, Indian and Northern Affairs, the Department of the Environment? On initial examination, it is strongly suggested that a single department be designated by Cabinet as the agency responsible for Northern Sovereignty and that it be tasked with the introduction of a White Paper for passage in Parliament. This task has a sense of urgency – it must be assigned before global warming allows year round navigation by shipping through the northwest passage.

What should this paper address? There are a myriad of issues that have been identified in detail in the Vimy paper. However, a start point should be a commitment by the Government of Canada to the following areas of development: Designation/construction of two northern deep water ports (east and west portals); designation of national and regional air hubs; development of a northern military training centre; cooperation with surrounding Arctic countries; control of northern waterways, and environmental protection for northern communities but to name a few.

I have touched on several major issues involved in the development of the White Paper. There are many more issues and major categories of work that would have to be addressed. Suffice it to say, the blueprint for the paper has been identified in many forums and it should not be difficult for the designated department to examine and study the work that has been done over the past 10 years. What is needed now is to energize the government to move forward on this tremendously important issue.

As in any new initiative, the subject of funding is of prime consideration. The cost of a White Paper is not the issue. Funding for the identified requirements laid out in the paper is. However, the paper need not set out specific timelines for the introduction and acquisition of infrastructure, equipment and people. What is needed is the identification of such resources and as successive budgets are introduced, spending to support the policy can be incrementally introduced. Each department responsible for its sphere of influence can identify parts of the White Paper or plan in their annual budget requirements so that overall, the policy will eventually be implemented.

Who has the lead? This is the third time in this op ed that this question has been asked. The answer, once again, is Cabinet should designate one department and assign it the responsibility for Northern Sovereignty. If a single department is *not feasible*, then a joint effort should be undertaken.

We recommend this White Paper be undertaken *jointly* by *DFAIT/DND* as both departments have tremendous influence over its outcome: the Department of Foreign Affairs for issues concerning the sovereignty over the waterways and agreements with the other Arctic nations; and the Department of National Defence for the defence of the region. Other departments would of course cooperate in their fields of expertise in providing the coordination and input required to make the proposed policy work. What we are asking for is a commitment, a policy that Canadians can share and support and indeed make the true north "strong and free".

Does the government of Canada have the political will to ensure our northern sovereignty for future generations?

Shortly, the Prime Minister will be visiting our Arctic communities once again. What will he be announcing? Prime Minister, here is the gist of your speech.

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