

Report of the Yukon Arctic Security Advisory Council

November 2024



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Letter of Transmittal From the ASAC Chair to Premier

Dear Premier,

On behalf of the Yukon Arctic Security Advisory Council, I am pleased to submit our report. It has been our distinct honor to serve in this capacity and we truly hope that you find our analysis and recommendations to be of value to you, your government, and the people of the Yukon.

The Government of Yukon took a bold and constructive step in establishing the Advisory Council. You made it clear, in our letters of instruction, that we were to approach our work in a collaborative fashion, leaving space for active and mutually supportive engagement with the Government of Canada and its relevant departments and agencies, Yukon First Nations, Yukon municipalities, the Government of Alaska, non-governmental organizations and others. We believe that this report captures the spirit of the Council's mandate and charts a logical and sustainable path forward.

We look forward to hearing from you about the report and the security and defense challenges and opportunities that lie ahead. We stand by ready to assist the government and people of the Yukon as we all address the remarkable and complex forces that continue to shape and transform our lives, communities, nation and world.

Yours truly,



Dr. Ken Coates
Chair
Yukon Arctic Security Advisory Council

Yukon Arctic Security Advisory Council



Dr. Ken Coates is a distinguished Fellow and Director of Indigenous Affairs at the Macdonald-Laurier Institute and former Chair of Yukon University's Indigenous governance program. His writing focuses on areas such as Arctic sovereignty and northern treaty and land claims processes. Dr. Coates is nationally recognized in the study of northern and Indigenous issues in Canada.

(Photo: University of Saskatchewan)



Dr. Heather Exner-Pirot is a Senior Fellow and Director of Energy, Natural Resources and Environment at the Macdonald-Laurier Institute, Special Advisor to the Business Council of Canada and Research Advisor to the Indigenous Resource Network. She has 20 years of experience in areas including Indigenous economic development, Arctic security, energy security and Arctic governance.

(Photo: LinkedIn)



Chief Pauline Frost has always kept her Gwich'in cultural connections strong, while dedicating her career to furthering the interests of the Vuntut Gwitchin. Before being elected Vuntut Gwitchin First Nation Chief, she was elected as the Liberal MLA in the Vuntut Gwitchin electoral district, and served as Minister of Health and Social Services, Minister of the Environment, and Minister responsible for the Yukon Housing Corporation. Chief Frost has also worked for VGFN as the nations' negotiator and intergovernmental coordinator and served as Chair of the Yukon Salmon Sub-Committee.

(Photo: vgfn.ca)



Grand Chief Peter Johnston was first elected to lead the Council of Yukon First Nations in June, 2016. He is on his third term as Grand Chief. He has over 20 years of experience in the public service and has demonstrated his leadership abilities at the highest levels of First Nations Governance. As a member of the Teslin Tlingit Council (TTC) he sat in many capacities including Education, Investments and Economic Development. Peter is passionate about passing on his cultural teachings to his four children. He enjoys playing hockey, hunting, fishing and living a traditional lifestyle.

(Photo: Council of Yukon First Nations)



Major-General (Retired) Derek Joyce served in the Canadian Forces for 36 years. His career included appointments in Privy Council Office as the Military Advisor to the National Security Advisor and Director of Operations in Foreign and Defence Policy. From 2019 to 2021, he served as Deputy Commander Continental United States NORAD region at Tyndall Air Force Base, Florida.

(Photo: U.S. Air Force)



Dr. P. Whitney Lackenbauer is Canada Research Chair in the Study of the Canadian North and a Professor in the School for the Study of Canada at Trent University. He specializes in Arctic security, sovereignty and governance issues. From 2014 to 2020, he served as the honorary lieutenant-colonel of the 1st Canadian Ranger Patrol Group stationed in Yellowknife, Northwest Territories, and was reappointed to this position from 2022 to 2025.

(Photo: P. Whitney Lackenbauer)



Dr. Jennifer Spence is the Project Director of the Arctic Initiative at the Harvard Kennedy School's Belfer Center for Science and International Affairs. Her areas of expertise include international governance, institutional effectiveness, sustainable development and public policy. Dr. Spence also spent 18 years in senior roles with the Government of Canada focusing on resource management, conflict and change management, strategic planning, and leadership development.

(Photo: Belfer Center)

Report of the Yukon Arctic Security Advisory Council

Summary of the Terms of Reference:

The Yukon Arctic Security Advisory Council (herein “ASAC” or “the Council”) was established to provide expert advice on the Yukon’s security infrastructure and strategic direction for meeting the Yukon’s security goals. The Council was asked to explore opportunities for the Yukon’s economic and social advancement while meeting those goals. Specifically,

- The Council will develop a report that captures salient context, considerations, and short- and long-term recommendations to the Yukon government on this topic.
- Specific areas which are within the scope of this work include, but are not limited to:
 - Opportunities related to the federal North American Aerospace Defense Command (NORAD) modernization investment;
 - Dual-use infrastructure, including communications, transportation, energy, and community infrastructure, and marine infrastructure that may also support Arctic shipping such as the possible future development of King Point;
 - Participation in Canadian critical minerals supply chains;
 - Energy security;
 - Connections with Alaska and southern Canada that support continental defence;
 - Indigenous involvement in Canada’s Arctic defence; and
 - Strategic positioning to advance Yukon interests with the federal government related to security and defence.

Executive Summary – Yukon Arctic Security Advisory Council Report

Russian aggression in Europe, melting sea ice, Chinese air balloons, critical minerals; these and other factors are once again seen to be raising the geopolitical stakes in the Canadian Arctic. Rather than being seen as a passive or vulnerable actor, the Government of Yukon intends to contribute to local, national and North American security by sharing its ideas and leveraging its abilities. The Yukon can be a bulwark for Canadian interests in the North.

To identify and address the opportunities and threats arising from its geographical position, the Government of Yukon established the Arctic Security Advisory Council in Fall 2023. Enhanced through bipartisan political engagement and conversations with selected Government of Canada departments and agencies, this report provides a strategic overview of the territory's security environment, as well as ways to strengthen it.

Despite occasional hyperbole about Arctic sovereignty, and real challenges to Canadian defence capabilities, the Yukon is well defended and appropriately prepared to meet the most realistic strategic and military threats to the territory itself. The Canadian Rangers, offering strategic reconnaissance across the territory, are well established in patrols throughout the region and provide excellent guidance to southern-based troops that deploy north. They further provide community-based capacity to respond to humanitarian and environmental emergencies. The Government of Yukon provides a wide range of services and programs that assert and protect Canadian sovereignty and interests in the Far Northwest. The territory is inherently difficult for adversaries to access. The Yukon is, in sum, safe, secure, and prepared, enjoying at least the same degree of protection and security as Canadians in general. Conventional military threats to Arctic security would most likely pass through the Yukon rather than being directed at the Yukon. While the Government of Yukon has a well-established understanding of what is going on within the territory, it is eager to learn more about the threats that exist outside its borders and the implications for its citizens.

This necessarily requires collaboration. The territory's defense depends to a large degree on the efforts of the Canadian Armed Forces (CAF) and the North American Aerospace Defense Command. The Yukon is prepared to take responsibility for being on the frontlines of Canadian Arctic security and is eager to take a broader view of its obligations in providing for the defence and security of its citizens' interests. Amongst the planning that must take place now are the Yukon's role in NORAD modernization; contributions to supply chain security in the form of critical minerals development; and enhanced emergency response in the face of climate change, unconventional military threats, and gaps in economic and social infrastructure.

This report recommends the following concrete initiatives to enhance Yukon's security, to the benefit of its citizens but also those beyond its borders:

Expand and enhance support to the Canadian Rangers throughout the Yukon

The Canadian Rangers are the most significant national military presence in the Yukon. The Department of National Defence (DND) should enhance its support to the Canadian Rangers in the Yukon through more frequent and challenging training activities, and consider the potential of creating a detachment of the 1st Canadian Ranger Patrol Group in Whitehorse.

Establish a Specialized Whitehorse-Based Primary Reserve Unit

If the CAF are prepared to make a more substantial contribution in the Yukon, they should consider the establishment of a company-sized (30 to 40 people) Reserve unit to be based in Whitehorse.

Establish an Integrated Yukon Community Public Safety Program (YCPSP)

The YCPSP would adopt a broad and comprehensive definition of security and defence, incorporating military, civilian, environmental, extreme weather, and technological threats. Program participants would be prepared and trained as generalists within their respective communities, and would have on-the-ground, first responder capabilities across a broad range of potential threats

Ensure the Sustainability of Foundational Infrastructure

The Yukon, as a sub-Arctic environment vulnerable to extreme cold for several winter months each year, must maintain reliable energy, transportation and communications infrastructure as well as an appropriate level of redundancy, all of which should be maintained to high civilian and military standards. In the years ahead, the Yukon and the DND will need to remain vigilant with respect to northern infrastructure.

Engage with Western Arctic Maritime Defence Planning

Protecting the Beaufort Sea and the western entrance to the Northwest Passage has emerged as a necessity for the Government of Canada. The Yukon warrants a seat at national planning and preparation tables so that the territory can synchronize its port access opportunities with national security needs. There are also opportunities to better use the Canadian Rangers in the Yukon to monitor activity in these waters during the open water season, either as part of Operation Nanook Nunakput or a distinct operation in concert with the Canadian Coast Guard.

Information Coordination and Integrated Security Planning

The Yukon needs to develop more systematic understandings of the national and continental security environment, including regular briefings by Canadian military and intelligence agencies, and closer collaboration with civilian counterparts in the State of Alaska.

Collaborate with Alaska and CAF/DND (particularly Defence Research Development Canada) on Research Related to Arctic/Winter Military Activities and Infrastructure

Alaska and the Yukon (on behalf of Canada) should develop and promote enhanced regional capacities in Arctic and winter training, operations, infrastructure, and equipment.

Contribute to Critical Mineral Supply

The Yukon, and the Canadian North more generally, have the potential to play a vital role in assuring the supply of strategic minerals. This would require a marked change in current strategies, which prioritize consultation and complex approval processes over prompt reviews and would need much greater attention to the commercial and logistical requirements of resource development. This will require, in turn, extensive work with Yukon First Nations, whose endorsement of a revised approval process is essential to the long-term stability and reliability of northern resource development.

Maintain Strategic Vigilance

The Yukon Arctic Security and Advisory Council was created in 2023 to provide guidance to the Government of Yukon about 21st century military and civilian preparedness requirements. The Yukon requires ongoing strategic vigilance and needs to stay alert to the military and defence preparations and investments

Soldiers from the 3rd Battalion, Princess Patricia's Canadian Light Infantry pass sandbags down the chain to add to the wall during Operation LENTUS in Marsh Lake, Yukon on July 11, 2021. Photo © 2021 DND-MDN Canada.



across the country and hemisphere. The Yukon would benefit from an independent advisory body that draws on broader Canadian expertise to monitor this broad and highly variable field on an ongoing basis.

The Government of Yukon clearly understands that even a demographically small and remote jurisdiction such as itself is subject to broad and complex geopolitical and military forces and influences. This report considers the opportunities for the Yukon to contribute to national security and defence, providing a realistic and politically informed analysis of what investments are possible and appropriate for the territory. The Yukon is an active participant in Arctic security preparations and is eager to play a more active role in future planning and implementation. Its partners would be wise to facilitate this.

Introduction: Safe, Secure and Prepared: The Yukon and Arctic Defence and Security

Canada is a highly favoured nation and the Yukon even more so. Canada is recognized as a stable and well-functioning democracy and the Yukon enjoys a reputation as effectively governed and managed, including having well-established relationships with Yukon First Nations and the federal government. Oceans separate our country from potential adversaries in Europe and Asia. The world's greatest military power, the United States of America, helps provide security coverage to all of North America. Alaska is heavily militarized, with the effect that many of Yukon's international protection and security needs are also provided for. That said, the reality is that the U.S. security systems are designed to protect America's broad geopolitical interests, and Alaskan assets protect that country's northern flank and North Pacific interests.

Nonetheless, as Canada's April 2024 Defence Policy Update makes clear, the CAF must establish a "greater presence, reach, mobility, and responsiveness in the Arctic and North to deal with disasters, threats and challenges to our sovereignty," and ensure that our northern waters, airspace, and territory cannot

be "used as an avenue to harm Canada, our closest ally the United States, or other North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) allies." Of course, military power alone is insufficient to deter and defeat aggressive actions by adversaries across the broad spectrum of security threats that we now face. The federal and territorial governments are responsible for a wide range of security and public safety missions that fall outside of the mandate of the DND and the CAF, and thus require a whole-of-government approach. This means that Canadian governments must coordinate many instruments of national power to ensure public safety and security.

Although the CAF and public safety agencies have a minimal presence in the Canadian North, including the Yukon, the region is not undefended. In a world where a rapidly changing climate, new challenges to global stability, and accelerating advances in technology are affecting the foundations of Canadian security and prosperity, the combination of American military preparedness and Canada's defence establishment provides Canada and the Yukon with timely, appropriate, and adequate strategic oversight and protection. This is as much a function of the American presence in Alaska and the physical geography of contemporary strategic affairs as it is a reflection of national investment in Arctic and sub-Arctic defence. The current reality, however, is that the Yukon is defended and appropriately prepared to meet the most conventional strategic and military threats.

The Yukon is without the standard manifestations of a well-defended strategic frontier. It does not have a string of military posts along the border like in Finland, a major American air and space base like Greenland, or frontline military airbases like Norway

and northern Australia. There is no winter-focused training centre, as in Labrador, and there is no naval presence along the Yukon's northern coastline. The small professional military establishment in the Yukon is vastly outstripped by the size of the armed forces in New Brunswick and Alberta. Even Saskatchewan, protected by geography from military threats, has more military personnel based permanently in the province than the Yukon. That said, these military establishments are considered "garrison" forces and conduct training and support for troops that, for the most part, need to deploy to conduct operations in support of Canadian interests rather than "fight from their bases". Accordingly, they have been established in locations where support for training, troops and their families are optimized.

The Yukon makes a significant contribution nonetheless. The Canadian Rangers, offering a strategic reconnaissance screen across the region, are well established in patrols throughout the territory and provide excellent on-the-ground oversight, training, advice, and guidance to southern-based troops that deploy north. They also provide community-based capacity to respond to humanitarian or environmental emergencies. A training centre near Whitehorse hosts hundreds of cadets each summer. The Government of Yukon provides a wide range of services and programs that assert and protect Canadian sovereignty in the Far Northwest. In the broader contemporary definition of security, which includes protection from a wide variety of threats and challenges, the Government of Yukon ensures that residents and visitors alike enjoy a high level of personal safety and protection from foreign and domestic threats. The Yukon is, in sum, safe, secure, and prepared, enjoying, in the here and now, the same degree of protection and security as Canadians in general.

The Nature of the Arctic Threat

Military preparedness and security, while focused on immediate realities, must also account for future and potential dangers. Strategic planning requires constant vigilance, a firm and up-to-date understanding of contemporary geopolitics, and an ability to move human and other resources to vulnerable sites. In the 21st century, concepts of defence and security have expanded to include cyberattacks, the consequences of rapid climate change, and the unpredictability of international terrorism.

The changing character of conflict means that artificial intelligence, quantum computing, synthetic biology, data analytics, autonomous systems, robotics and advanced cyber and space technologies create new vulnerabilities and complicate our national security interests, transforming both conventional military warfare and competition below the threshold of conflict. Accordingly, the protection of national sovereignty means more than defending physical territory against a direct military attack. Attention must now be paid to improving and maintaining communication channels, Internet and cellular network connectivity, food and energy supplies, resource availability, and reliable information (given its contemporary counterpart, misinformation). The challenge of preparing and defending a jurisdiction or a nation requires partnerships with a full range of civilian, policing and other authorities, based on a commitment to shared objectives and the appropriate flow of information.

A nation, and a sub-national jurisdiction like the Yukon, must be aware of a growing and increasingly complex set of risks and dangers, international in nature, that merit securitization. These include, but are not limited to:

- The unknown and unpredictable effects of climate change, which will range from substantial shifts in weather, extreme weather events, long-term climatic transitions, large scale environmental shifts and related disruptions to infrastructure, existing technologies, and security systems.
- Russia's unprovoked large-scale invasion of Ukraine in February 2022, which altered the global security landscape. Coupled with the Russian military buildup in its Arctic, unresolved continental shelf boundaries in the Arctic Ocean, and Russia's revisionist behaviour in other parts of the world, this has raised questions about Canada's ability to protect itself and its interests in the Far North from nuclear, conventional, and hybrid threats from Russia.
- China's economic ascendancy and concomitant assertiveness in global politics. While the Chinese military threat focuses primarily on Asia, China's ever-expanding economic, scientific, and political reach has raised concerns around the world about the country's long-term aspirations. Analysts also offer different opinions on the sustainability of the Chinese economy and, by extension, how domestic instability may translate in its foreign affairs. That China and Russia have become closer together economically and politically, has elevated the risk of a combined China-Russia threat in the Arctic.
- Terrorist attacks have hit in waves over the past half century, ranging from large-scale attacks on military and civilian targets to smaller attacks on individuals or infrastructure. Equally worrisome are the increasingly common intrusions by organized crime, involving the movement and sale of drugs, human trafficking, and a wide variety of other illegal acts. The task of identifying, surveilling, and apprehending terrorists and criminals in Canada falls under the authorities of police, and other civilian agencies.
- Global instability, generally, caused by a fluid combination of radical politics, religious tensions, social unrest, international mobility, rising inequality, and economic distress, has become a force in its own right. The challenges to the post-Second World War international system and the reputation and authority of the United Nations combined with the risks of global supply chains and economic interdependence has left the world feeling frayed and increasingly vulnerable. Regional conflicts have the potential to draw in other nations and disrupt political and economic conditions. These instabilities require Canada to reconsider its strategic assumptions, preparations, and long-term strategic and military plans.

What Does the Yukon Need to Secure and Defend?

As the Yukon considers its strategic role as a subnational jurisdiction within Canada, it is essential to understand that the territory and the nation-state have vital but very different responsibilities. One of the first obligations of a nation-state is to defend its national borders. Canada's northwest borders include the long Yukon-Alaska boundary along the 141st Meridian, as well as the unsettled maritime boundaries in the Beaufort Sea in the Far North. In the case of the Yukon, a subnational government, its responsibilities relate to addressing threats internal to its borders. However, both federal and territorial levels of government must work closely together and in concert to effectively defend Canada's northern-most borders and both governments have a responsibility to protect Yukon citizens.

The Yukon and Canada must also ensure that critical physical infrastructure – the electric grid, fuel supplies, transportation corridors, Internet and cellular network connectivity – is well-protected, serviceable, and reliable. This is a core security and public safety need. Airports and other transportation infrastructure must be maintained, with sufficient and appropriate redundancy. The territory also needs the human capacity and social infrastructure to sustain its society, including policing, health, education and technical expertise, and other key services. In this context, given the challenges of building infrastructure in

the north, future investments must be viewed from the lens of multi-use development. That is, wherever possible, investments in infrastructure must be innovative to meet both government objectives and civilian communities' needs, and to bolster resilience considering new realities associated with a changing climate.

Digital connectivity and secure, robust, dependable communications systems are essential for the operation of governments and civil society. Recent Government of Yukon investments in Internet infrastructure, including the establishment of digital redundancy, bring significant improvements, as does a suitable satellite-based communications network. As western societies become more digital and more reliant on instant, reliable connections, protecting and enhancing digital security has become increasingly essential for social, economic, and political stability. Only a few years ago, the Yukon had serious deficits in these areas, and significant vulnerabilities remain to be addressed, particularly with “last mile” connections between the grid and individual homes and the nationally-imposed restrictions that prevent redundancy through American connections.

The world is increasingly aware of the importance of critical minerals, deemed essential to contribute to the energy transition and the new economies at the subnational, national and international levels. Countries that possess such resources, including Canada, have an urgent responsibility to ensure that these resources are available to meet national and allied requirements.

Canada's credibility and reliability as an international ally is vital to our own security and to our sovereignty. The most stalwart line of defence for Canada and, by extension, the Yukon, has been the country's military alliances and collaborations with the United States. Connections through NORAD, NATO, and other partnerships have provided the country with amongst the most militarily secure and strategically well-protected jurisdictions in the world. Although the Yukon-Alaska connection is underdeveloped and has been for generations, this gap is more significant on the civilian front than it is on the military side. The long, mutually respectful and collaborative partnerships between the Yukon and Alaska remain a cornerstone of the Yukon's security and protection.

More broadly, the Yukon and Canada have benefited from the remarkable stability of the Western liberal order that followed the end of the Second World War and that appeared to have been secured by the collapse of the

Soviet Union. In the 1990s, the ascendancy of liberal democracy and industrial capitalism seemed assured, releasing a burst of optimism and confidence across the West. The euphoria proved short-lived. The rise of China, resurgent Russian nationalism, Middle Eastern turmoil, climate change, mass international migration, rising global crime, rampant extremism, and many other forces have roused the West from its complacency and ushered in an age of uncertainty, suspicion, and considerable fear. As the Western alliance faces more acute legacy and emergent challenges, concerns about national defence and security increase apace. An increasingly turbulent and unpredictable world affects the security, well being, and prosperity of all Canadians. Although far removed from the front lines of conflict in the South China Sea, Israel-Gaza, Afghanistan, or the horn of Africa, the Yukon is not immune from the uncertainties and geopolitical turmoil of the modern age.

21st Century Threats and Opportunities

Canada has wrestled for generations with its military requirements in the Canadian North and this continues to the present day. Today, national commentary emphasizes the shortcomings of the Canadian defence establishment, from a dry-docked naval fleet, to difficulties recruiting and retaining soldiers, to limited capacity to deploy Canadian troops overseas. Faced with growing fiscal pressures and the absence of a Government of Canada plan to reach its NATO commitment to dedicate 2% of Canada's GDP on military spending, the CAF finds itself in a precarious position amidst growing global uncertainty. The April 2024 federal Defence Policy Update promises a significant re-alignment of the CAF, but recruitment efforts continue to miss targets, costs are rising, funding is uncertain (as is the ability to spend it, owing to the federal government's well-documented procurement challenges), and the list of responsibilities and requests for engagement are escalating in number and complexity. Policy implementation comes with a long-time horizon, making it susceptible to shifting political priorities.

In these circumstances, redefining the role of the CAF in the Canadian North will be extremely difficult. The small permanent military establishment in the Canadian North is unlikely to expand significantly in the near future, even as multibillion-dollar investments in NORAD infrastructure in the Arctic proceeds.

Modest investments to expand and enhance the training and effectiveness of the Canadian Rangers are certainly possible in the current political, financial, and strategic environment. The Rangers attract surprisingly little attention across the country, despite their outsized and critical role in the security and assertion of

sovereignty in remote, coastal, and northern communities. These members of the Reserve Force work in some of the most difficult-to-reach regions and their unique expertise and knowledge have proven crucial in enabling military operations, building local resilience, and in keeping communities safe. Bringing local and Indigenous knowledge to bear on issues of northern military preparedness, the more than 300 Rangers in the Yukon serve Canada and their communities in challenging climatic and geographic conditions, and they do so with little support and assistance.

With growing international pressures, alleged foreign interference in Canadian elections, mounting cyberattacks, the continued threat of terrorism and other interference in national affairs, Canada's military and strategic capabilities are divided and stretched to the limit. With the Canadian guard down on multiple fronts, setting priorities and making forward-looking investments has proven difficult. The complexity of contemporary security and defence realities and Canada's geographic and political position, puts extraordinary pressure on the nation's political leaders to set priorities. Advocates for enhanced support for the military have a lengthy list of urgent requirements, from a long overdue modernization of the air force and the navy, to the improvement of Canadian capacity for international deployment, and a significant upgrade of military infrastructure across the country.

The Territorial North suffers in the priority setting, as it almost always has. The Government of Canada will, in concert with the United States and other allies, provide for surveillance over the Canadian North so that it can defend against threats to North America that would pass through the region.

Adversarial states are rapidly developing and expanding military capabilities that threaten our security, including submarines, long-range aircraft, and hypersonic missiles that move faster and are harder to detect. Upgrading our continental defences to ensure they can deter threats, or defeat them when necessary, requires a proportionate military presence in the Arctic and the Yukon. Canada's borders will be protected and maintained, and national interests will be defined and asserted across the region, particularly when it comes to resources and development. Nevertheless, absent a direct military attack or imminent threat to Canadian interests in the Arctic, we do not expect a major expansion of the CAF in the Yukon.

The Canadian North is not undefended, but it is not well-prepared for the strategic realities of the 21st century. It was not always this way. During the Second World War, when Canada was also caught unprepared for the dangers of a two-front war against the Axis powers, the country let the Americans develop military infrastructure across the North. The Alaska Highway linked northern Alberta to Alaska, bisecting the Yukon. The CANOL pipeline transported oil from Norman Wells to the newly built refinery in Whitehorse. Other projects, like the Northwest Staging Route, improved air travel throughout the region, and transformed the economic and social conditions in the Yukon.

Canada learned its lesson from ignoring the region and expanded its presence in the Northwest after the war's end. Whitehorse was converted from a wartime transportation and administrative centre into the territorial capital, a major air force base, and the DND's primary site in the Territorial North. The construction of a series of radar systems, particularly the Distant Early Warning (DEW)

Line in the Far North, left markers of continental defence across the region. Whitehorse was as much a military town as a government centre in the 1960s. But the government withdrew the army and air force from the Yukon in the 1960s and 1970s, reducing the Armed Forces' footprint to almost pre-Second World War levels. Since that time, it has remained very small, apart from the reinvigoration of the Canadian Ranger presence in the Yukon since the early 1990s.

Given that our premier defence partner sits directly to the west, the Yukon would also benefit from developing a comprehensive understanding of Alaska's place in the North American military system and the State's civil defence and emergency preparedness. The impression presented about Alaska, going back to the intensity of the Cold War, is that the state is well-prepared for the protection of the Northwest flank of North America. While U.S. military establishment in Alaska is large and extremely well-armed, its resources are focused primarily on preparation for conflict or intervention in East Asia. Given the high interest in North Korea, China, Taiwan, Japan, and other potential hot spots, and given the proximity of Alaska to the Far East (the Aleutian Islands are closer to Tokyo than Seattle), it is hardly surprising that the U.S. military would prioritize Asia-Pacific strategic interests. Should conflict break out in the South China Sea, for example, many of the core resources currently based in Alaska would be deployed to the conflict zone. The Yukon and Canada need to prepare for the possibility that a considerable portion of the American military resources allocated to Alaska would not be available if the United States became involved in a war in Asia. Of course, neither the Government of Canada nor that of the Yukon will have a say in the employment of U.S. military forces.

Intensification and Broadening of Security and Defence Considerations

Defence and security requirements have changed dramatically since the 1960s. Advanced surveillance systems, satellite-based communications, unmanned aerial systems (drones), long-range missiles, and a full range of cyber technologies have assumed greater prominence and have altered military training, deployment, preparation, and investments. Many modern security issues – financial cyberattacks, manipulation through social media, environmental change, aggressive misinformation, and political interference—are not conventional military challenges, and yet they represent attacks on our economy, democracy, and the integrity of our modern information-based society. Moreover, these modern security issues require whole-of-government responses that need the involvement of all levels of government to ensure preparedness.

These changing realities represent real dangers to sub-national governments, whose systems are vulnerable to attack, but which rarely have the resources to prepare for and deflect such assaults. The changing nature of international conflict, in turn, means that the definition of preparedness must be rethought and reformatted. Old concepts of defence and security no longer completely serve the country or territory sufficiently, meaning that the standard metrics of military preparedness (the number of troops, ships, tanks, bombs, and other personnel and hardware) no longer adequately illustrate the ability to defend the country and ensure security.

In this environment, it is important to redefine Canadian vulnerability. The rhetoric, particularly from advocates for extensive military investment and expansion, typically focuses on imminent Russian and Chinese military threats and Canada's limited ability to respond to immediate requests for international assistance. By conventional military metrics, and to the chagrin of our major allies, Canada is ill-prepared to assume its proper place in the protection of the continent and the Western liberal order. As the national debate about alleged Chinese political interference demonstrates, Canada's capacity to deal with cyber threats and misinformation is also less than ideal. According to some analysts, this contretemps represents the thin edge of a wedge that threatens to bring industrial espionage, technological terrorism, further interference in elections, cyberattacks, malign interventions using Artificial Intelligence, and other emerging threats and dangers. Twenty-first century security requires attention to these challenges as much as an adversarial bomber or ballistic missile.

The Canadian North is also on the frontlines of many of the impacts of climate change, including wildfires, extreme weather events, and permafrost thaw. These challenges represent new risks that threaten the safety of Yukoners and the protection and reliability of the territory's physical, social and economic infrastructure. In this context, security in the Yukon needs to be expanded to include on-the-ground, real-time capacity and governance mechanisms to support emergency preparedness and response. By investing in community-based capacity, Canada also reduces the burden on national systems to respond.

The Yukon represents an opportune environment for testing and sustaining 21st century technologies and practices that enable coordinated international and internal responses, integrated operations, whole-of-government coordination, and collaboration with allies and partners to detect, understand, and overcome challenges. Preparing for rapidly shifting strategic and geopolitical realities of this age will require flexibility, creativity, and new approaches to national defence and security preparations.

The politics of military investments often affects strategic planning. In nations the world over, bases, troop placement, procurement decisions, and even the selection of specific military equipment often reflect political considerations more than military priorities. Communities and regions that host military establishments count on the bases for economic and social stability and fight to keep and expand them. As politicians gather to make multi-billion-dollar decisions that are, ultimately, central to national defence and strategic preparedness, they are influenced by democratic and partisan considerations. This reality, which in no way is unique to Canada, can result in decisions that do not always address the most pressing military considerations.

The co-mingling of strategic and political decision-making is both inevitable and, in many circumstances, beneficial to all concerned. Military investments have long served as a key pillar of regional and national economic development. Coordinated military-civilian investments have backed

important regional infrastructure projects, like the Alaska Railway linking Fairbanks to Seward, backstopped major improvements in communications systems, and sustained important research initiatives of broad societal benefit. The Yukon has significant development interests, including services and airport and road construction and maintenance, that clearly overlap with military requirements.

The development of the Northwest has long been defined by military projects, albeit ones undertaken with no regional input. The construction of the Alaska Highway and Canadian Oil (CANOL) projects during the Second World War continues to define the human geography of the territory. Likewise, the Dempster Highway was initially a military undertaking. Leveraging military needs, and investment in capital and capacity to support the social and economic security of the Yukon, are longstanding elements of national development.

Accordingly, we welcome the 2024 federal Defence Policy Update's vision of an inclusive approach to national defence rooted in deepening "dialogue with northern and Arctic stakeholders, including to establish multipurpose northern infrastructure that can support Canadian Armed Forces operations and contribute towards the needs of territorial governments, Indigenous peoples, and Northern communities wherever possible, consistent with the Arctic and Northern Policy Framework."

Changing the Narrative – From the Undefended North to Prepared and Engaged

These are, for good and important reasons, intense strategic and military times. The world is on edge and geopolitical tensions cause legitimate concern around the world. Russian adventurism with Chinese and other foreign influences has raised the strategic stakes. This happened immediately after the Second World War, at the height of the Cold War, in the first decade of the 21st century, and now again in recent years. In the 2020s, however, Arctic concerns compete with a broad range of global uncertainties. Politicians and military leaders must make choices, and these are expensive, difficult, meaningful and strategically important judgements. In so doing, they have to balance inter-agency priorities, regional needs and interests, and partisan political considerations. Hard enough before the advent of cyberwarfare and artificial intelligence, these decisions have become increasingly difficult and politically fraught.

For the last two decades, concerns about impending climate change effects have percolated in the background of national decision-making, and these concerns are now coming to the political foreground. Widespread forest fires, major flooding events, the melting of the Arctic permafrost, unanticipated weather events, long droughts, and other climate related changes have elevated environmental considerations on the national and international agenda. The Arctic, no longer an afterthought in climate change conversations, is front and

centre in the global conversation, providing graphic illustrations of retreating ice cover, shrinking glaciers, and changing vegetation that highlight the extreme vulnerability of the northern latitudes. The challenges of coping with climate – a multi-billion-dollar, long-term challenge – threatens to divert attention from more traditional security and defence considerations, particularly if climate and military security are set up as an “either-or” equation. Governments must be prepared to deliver both.

Canada’s Arctic and North is not undefended. As a part of NORAD, Canada with the United States coordinate the aerospace defence of North America. In addition, within the CAF, the Canadian Joint Operational Command (CJOC) is responsible for planning and directing most Canadian military operations domestically and internationally, including in Canada’s North. In the North, these responsibilities, include search and rescue operations, and Operation Nanook – a year-round operation that exercises the defence of Canada’s North. Through Operation Nanook, the CAF practices its ability to deploy and sustain forces in the Arctic; demonstrates the Royal Canadian Navy’s presence in Canada’s northern waters; conducts surveillance in Canada’s Arctic waters; and cooperates in a whole-of-government approach to address key threats identified by territorial governments. Operation Nanook is conducted in a cooperative environment, which includes working with key Allies and other federal departments and agencies, and territorial and Indigenous governments. The CAF also routinely conducts

domestic operations that resupply Canadian Forces Station Alert, maintains the High Arctic Data Communications System, detects threats to Canadian security, and responds to forest fires, floods, and other environmental disasters. These operations provide a roadmap on how the CAF is ready to respond to the defence and security needs of the Yukon. For example, an Operation Nanook deployment into the Yukon in 2019 focused on wildfire evacuation training, and the Government of Yukon participated in a territory-wide emergency preparedness exercise during Operation Nanook-Tatigiit in October 2023. Yukoners can also get a sense of the type of missions the CAF is prepared to conduct in the North by the missions conducted across the Canadian North including, but not limited to, mass casualty evacuation training, long-range patrols and survival training, and disaster planning.

The highly publicized events surrounding the high altitude downing of objects that flew over Canada and the United States in early 2023 serve to exemplify both the strengths and challenges in defending the Yukon. Through NORAD, a U.S. Air Force F-22 shot down a balloon over the Yukon, illustrating both the utility of the binational command and seamless interoperability between Canada and the United States. The follow-on attempt to recover the object highlighted the challenges of conducting land operations in

the Yukon, particularly in the winter, as well as the importance of building relationships and communicating clearly with territorial partners and rightsholders. Despite the close monitoring of the object and extended searches, the Royal Canadian Mounted Police-led effort was unable to locate the object due to the large search area, mountainous terrain, and high snowpack. This episode also led various Yukon First Nations to emphasize that “it is imperative” that they be “consulted in all matters that affect our people, lands, waters and skies.”

In today’s chaotic and uncertain geopolitical environment, it is important that the Yukon change the regional narrative. The standard message since the 1970s is that Canada’s Far Northwest is undefended and ill-prepared to contribute to continental defence and security. That line of analysis no longer holds. Instead, the Yukon should emphasize that the territory is well-prepared to support and is appropriately engaged in northern security concerns. Far from being an exposed flank – a position hard to sustain given the military resources available in Alaska – the Yukon is actually a bulwark for national and continental interests in the North. The territorial government has demonstrated considerable interest in this issue, including working diligently to include Yukon First Nations in the planning for northern security. Among the three Canadian territories, the Yukon is a leader in efforts to engage with

the Government of Canada and international organizations on northern defence issues. The Yukon, put simply, is an active participant in Arctic security preparations and is eager to play a more active role in future planning and implementation.

The Yukon brings a lot to the table, despite its limited constitutional obligations for national defence and conventional security issues. Through its advanced and widely dispersed civil service, the Government of Yukon has the best view of developments in the territory. This bureaucratic vigilance is supplemented by the impressive and systematic work of the Yukoners who serve as Canadian Rangers. Put simply, the Government of Yukon knows what is going on within its boundaries, and it is eager to learn more about the threats that exist outside its borders. The territory is prepared to take responsibility for being on the frontlines of Canadian Arctic security and is eager to take a broader view of its obligations in providing for the defence of its citizens' interests in the region.

The Government of Yukon is well-placed to capitalize on the “smallness” of government systems in the territory, which allows for extraordinary levels of coordination and cooperation and for speed and flexibility in its decision-making and management processes. The territory is capable of developing a plan,

together with the Government of Canada and the State of Alaska, to meet the complex and interconnected security and defence issues of our time. There is a window of opportunity to explore multi-use, multi-party, and multi-impact investments in “anchor” infrastructure that is needed for military and defence purposes and also serves other well-documented territorial and civilian needs. Coordinated approaches on communications, emergency response, and transportation facilities would allow for well-planned and effective strategic investments that both improve the quality of life in the Yukon and enhance Canada's northern defences. It is here, rather than a dramatic influx of permanent military forces into the territory, that the contribution of the Yukon is to be found.

NORAD Modernization and the “New” Canadian Military Presence in the North

One major development, the modernization of NORAD, looms large over discussions of Arctic defence and security. The investment is substantial with DND announcements in 2023 indicating \$38.6B in investments are planned over the next 20 years. NORAD modernization is broken down into five areas of investment that include modernizing surveillance systems, improving decision making through technology, modernizing air weapons systems, improving new infrastructure and support capabilities, and investing in science and technology. Each of these investment areas have specific projects contributing to improving the aerospace surveillance and security of North America.

First, the modernization of surveillance systems will see the development of over-the-horizon radar capabilities for Canada; the completion of a space-based surveillance system; and, a classified system that will improve surveillance in the north. Second,

the technological improvements to decision making will see the modernization of the CAF Military Command, Control, and Information Management System as well as the Canadian Combined Aerospace Operational Centre; upgrades to the high and low frequency, digital and satellite communications system in the north; air navigation systems improvements in the north; and moving to a cloud-based NORAD command and control system. Third, the air weapons systems modernization will see the Royal Canadian Air Force (RCAF) acquire short, medium and long-range missiles to improve Canada’s ability to engage air threats. Fourth, investments in new infrastructure will include the acquisition of new air to air refueling aircraft; development of infrastructure for the incoming F-35s; upgrades to current NORAD Forward Operating Locations in Inuvik, Yellowknife, Iqaluit, and Goose Bay; and improvements to the RCAF’s air operations training infrastructure. The Defence Policy Update also committed to establish northern operational support hubs consisting of airstrips, logistics facilities, and equipment and stockpiles of spare parts to increase military responsiveness, noting that “these hubs will present significant opportunities to establish multi-purpose infrastructure that serve the Canadian Armed Forces, other federal partners, territorial governments, Indigenous partners, and northern communities, wherever possible.” And finally, investments in science and technology are intended to aid in the assessment of new and emerging threats and to co-develop solutions with the United States.

This is a plan for the defence of North America. Northern leaders, for good reason, hope that the multibillion-dollar investment will offer new investments in northern economic and social prosperity, but their expectations must be recalibrated. As described above, the funds are directed towards upgrades to current systems and locations, or capabilities that are not based in the north. Discussions with DND officials indicate that funding lines have been allocated and there is, at this comparatively late date, only minimal flexibility in the identification of additional financial commitments for the North. For now, the focus on NORAD revitalization from the Government of Yukon perspective should be on ensuring the national procurement systems create commercial opportunities for northern businesses and workers. The core decisions have already been taken and are largely fixed.

In the coming years, the Yukon would benefit from engaging more comprehensively in developing and supporting national and continental aspirations in Arctic security. This is not a topic that favours or accepts region-first approaches. The Government of Yukon should continue its pattern of working with the Government of Canada and DND and avoid using defence and security as a wedge issue with federal politicians. Instead, the Yukon should focus its efforts on identifying and promoting potential multi-use infrastructure investments, designed to serve military and civilian purposes. Pressure on Canada to meet its commitment to the 2% GDP target set by NATO (Canada currently sits

at approximately 1.3%) provides an avenue for future investments and long-term engagement. When Canada makes decisions to invest in military and defence, the Governments of Canada and the Yukon should identify and co-develop projects that serve Yukoners' needs and interests as well as that of the military. Over time, participating in multi-use infrastructure and service projects could benefit the Yukon while contributing directly to Canadian security in the Arctic and North.

Federal military spending need not be on Yukon-specific commitments to benefit the territory. Yukon First Nations leadership articulated at their meeting with the Minister of National Defence in March 2023, that they are eager to identify partnership opportunities including procurement opportunities for Yukon First Nation businesses and development corporations, and planning for future military projects (including infrastructure) so they can support community needs where possible. Yukon companies, potentially working in joint ventures with Canadian and international defence contractors, can also bid for military contracts and execute projects outside the territory. Indigenous communities and companies from other parts of Canada have competed for and secured substantial government contracts, creating jobs and producing revenue for their communities. The Government of Yukon and Yukon First Nations can do more in this respect.

The Green Revolution, Critical Minerals, and the Yukon's Potential Contributions to Resource Security

The increasingly urgent matter of critical resource development may offer the Yukon an opportunity to make its greatest national contribution. The shift to the green economy and the associated energy transition requires, ironically, one of the greatest bursts of resource extraction in world history. In addition to ensuring the continued flow of oil, natural gas, and uranium, Canada and other nations must provide an adequate and reliable supply of minerals important for the development of the renewable energy economy. There is a fast-growing demand for copper, tungsten, and a wide variety of critical minerals, many of which can be found in commercial quantities in the Yukon.

For Canada to flourish economically, its industrial facilities must have a ready and properly priced supply of these minerals.

Having these minerals extracted and processed within Canada is a key element in the long-term security of the continent. The simple reality that many critical minerals are currently controlled by China or Chinese firms poses acute challenges for Canada and its allies. In this sense, a clear economic imperative is matched by equally intense and relevant security considerations. The Yukon can serve both its economic interests and national priorities by moving quickly and carefully to bring its mineral resources to market.

Moving quickly will not be easy in the Yukon. The long-term environmental and social legacy of resource development, particularly for Yukon First Nation communities, remains a vivid memory. Moving forward will require an unprecedented level of collaboration and co-management with Yukon First Nations, if the goals of ecological protection, societal wellbeing, and economic development in the national interest are to be met. At present, the complexities of project approval and review processes cause substantial delays and considerable commercial uncertainty. Attracting investment capital, a perpetual problem for northern resource developers, has become more challenging.

The Yukon has the potential to be a contributor to the supply of several critical minerals, but its current contributions to global markets are very modest. The extractive sector's total GDP in the Yukon in 2022 was valued at \$351 million. Most of that was silver and gold. Yukon hosts critical mineral deposits including primary deposits of copper, zinc, molybdenum, tungsten, tin, nickel and platinum group elements. The most advanced projects include Casino, Carmacks, and Kudz Ze Kayah, as well as the recently closed Minto copper mine.

At times, however, the rhetoric of the critical mineral shortage gets the best of northern observers. Some commentators talk openly about a new gold rush, led by the demand for these crucial resources. The reality is that Yukon's mining sector must compete in a global marketplace. In many places around the world, regulation, approval processes, and labour and environmental standards are much more development-friendly than in the Yukon. In only a few instances are the richness and accessibility of Yukon deposits such that they can attract ready investment. Challenges, such as distance to markets, a small local labour force, limited transportation and energy infrastructure, and extreme weather conditions, will conspire to make the Yukon an expensive mining jurisdiction. These are the main reasons why gold and silver – high value and low weight ratio metals – attract the most corporate attention. Higher commodity prices will spur more development, but exploration spending in 2023 was moderate, with 44 mineral exploration projects approved.

While the demand is real and substantial, and the opportunity impressive in select instances, the Yukon is not yet a prime area for the extraction of strategic minerals. Developers may come, over time, but the pace and barriers to development may well disappoint proponents and political leaders unless deliberate efforts are made to encourage and enable development in ways that benefit both investors and Yukoners. The Yukon has a potential commercial advantage in its open and collaborative relationships with Yukon First Nations and its strong environmental expectations. Positioning itself as a jurisdiction committed to ethical

mining, combined with a more responsive approval process, could attract substantial ESG (environmental, social, and governance)-motivated investments.

To proceed expeditiously with critical mineral development will require intense cooperation with Yukon First Nations, a review and improvement of current project review procedures, and a concerted effort by the Government of Canada and the nation's financial and investment institutions to make development funds available. It will take a formidable effort to align territorial procedures with the national and international sense of urgency that surrounds critical minerals. While it is important to get the procedures 'right' and imperative that Indigenous rights and interests be respected, developing review processes that allow the Yukon to contribute to the national effort remains essential to competing effectively.

Preparing a Yukon Defence and Security Plan

The Government of Yukon cannot prepare a plan for territorial defence and security on its own. It must work with various departments and agencies in the Government of Canada and, for some infrastructure links, the State of Alaska and other partner organizations to develop a strategy that will protect and support its residents and ensure the security of Canada and all Canadians. Doing so requires the utmost understanding and respect for the spirit of Canada's alliances, the Crown's agreements with Indigenous peoples, and the country's military commitments. Defence and security is no space for 'lone wolves,' or jurisdictions who act on their own without careful and collaborative preparation.

As a small jurisdiction, the Yukon is not able to dedicate a large amount of money or other resources to military and strategic purposes. It can, however, take a whole-of-government and whole-of-society approach to its investments related to security. The Government of Yukon can work across departmental and agency barriers and

mobilize personnel and resources outside of traditional bureaucratic silos. This will help to realize DND's vision of collaboration to seize the "enormous opportunities for the region" opened by defence investments that can only be unlocked by "doing things differently—to an inclusive approach to national defence that recognizes that there is nothing to defend if we do not put our people first."

An appropriate strategic and defence plan for the Yukon has several core elements:

- **Shared Military and Civilian Investments in Northern Infrastructure:** The Yukon and Canada require appropriate support systems, with well-developed and serviceable infrastructure that serve common civilian and military needs. This means ensuring that the electrical grid, airports, roads, bridges, Internet, cellular network and other critical infrastructure serves Yukoners well while also meeting Canadian and allied military requirements. Planning for dual-use infrastructure must be central in the future.
- **Engaging Yukon First Nations:** The Government of Yukon has strong and open relationships with Yukon First Nations. Indigenous Peoples in the North, in turn, have a long and distinguished history of engaging with the CAF. This continues into the present through extensive First Nations service in the Canadian Rangers in the Yukon. The opportunity and the need is to move well beyond basic consultation, which is important, to full and sustained partnerships between the Crown and First Nations in the provision of security measures in the territory.

- **Supporting Economic Stability and Diversification in the Yukon:** The post-pandemic Yukon faces a rapidly growing population, increasing cultural diversity, heavy dependence on government spending, uncertainty around resource development, and mixed returns from the tourist sector. The Yukon is searching for increased social and economic opportunities, particularly outside Whitehorse, and for long-term stability across the territory.
- **Concrete, Actionable Strategies to meet 21st Century Security and Defence Needs:** From extreme weather events to cyberattacks to supply chain vulnerabilities, how we understand security and defence needs to expand. Significant investments are required, particularly regarding remedial and preventative measures. The Yukon, in partnership with Yukon First Nations and the Government of Canada, requires explicit, evergreen strategies to prepare for and respond to these challenges and articulate clear lines of accountability and mechanisms for communication and decision making. Ongoing monitoring will be needed as the Yukon seeks to protect valuable infrastructure and facilities from these new types of risks and threats.
- **Yukoners' Support for and Interest in a Stronger Military Presence:** Yukoners have a long history of engagement with the armed forces, from the largest per capita support in Canada for the First World War effort to the transformative impacts of Second World War defence projects and post-war preparations. The territory is not militaristic nor agitated about potential security threats, but the citizenry is well aware that Canada has made minimal military investments directly in the North, and in the Yukon specifically since the 1960s.
- **Housing and Supporting an Enhanced CAF Establishment in the Yukon:** Among the many challenges facing the Yukon, the shortage of housing in Whitehorse and smaller communities continues to be a serious brake on social and economic development. A substantial expansion of the military presence in the territory would, unless extra steps are taken, complicate an already near-critical housing situation.

Yukon Arctic Security Advisory Council Recommendations

Canada's military and security system is adapting to rapidly changing geopolitical and ecological realities. The Government of Yukon wants to be a constructive partner in developing an appropriate national response to complex, emergent threats and dangers. All steps forward must be co-developed with the Government of Canada, producing the best possible outcomes for the country and Yukon, the territory. This is not a time or a topic for partisan or narrow territory-specific initiatives. Rather, as the Yukon has done in other fields in recent years, the territory has an opportunity to model collaborative strategic and defence planning by a sub-national government. A cooperatively prepared Yukon Strategy and Defence Plan could provide real leadership for the territorial North and for Canada.

Moving forward could include a combination of the following initiatives:

- **Expanding and enhancing support to the Canadian Rangers throughout the Yukon**

The Canadian Rangers are the most significant national military presence in the Yukon. The Rangers make a significant and sustained contribution to security and defence and have the capacity to do more. The DND should give serious consideration to enhancing its support to the Canadian Rangers establishment in the Yukon through training activities, including the potential of creating a detachment of 1st Canadian

Ranger Patrol Group in Whitehorse through which a small team of Ranger Instructors and clerks could directly support the Yukon patrols (and those in the Mackenzie Delta accessible by road through the Yukon). Investing further in this community-based Reserve force, which also supports the highly successful Junior Canadian Ranger youth program, brings clear benefits for Canadian security while simultaneously recognizing Indigenous and local knowledge and facilitating practical skill development through on-the-land activities. This meets the “people first” promise in the federal Defence Policy Update.

- **Establishing a Specialized Whitehorse-Based Primary Reserve Unit**

If the CAF are prepared to make a more substantial contribution in the Yukon, they should consider the establishment of a company-sized (30 to 40 people) Reserve unit to be based in Whitehorse. The Primary Reserve unit could capitalize on the unique attributes of the Yukon population (which is highly educated and has advanced scientific and technological capabilities). This is a realistic request, given the size of the territory and strategic pressures in the Northwest. It would also capitalize on the unique strengths and capabilities of Yukoners.

- **An Integrated YCPSP**

There is a much greater chance of the Yukon providing a national platform for developing a 21st century safety initiative. While respecting the needs and interests of the CAF and other federal agencies, this new initiative would focus on contemporary and forward-looking concerns of strategic and defensive preparations. Capitalizing on Yukon strengths and long-term partnerships with Yukon First Nations, this proposal would address security issues by linking the work of the Canadian Rangers and a potential Yukon primary reserve unit to related agencies and non-governmental organizations. The YCPSP would adopt a broad and comprehensive definition of security and defence. The program would incorporate civilian, environmental, military, extreme weather, and technological threats. Program participants would be prepared and trained as generalists, not technical specialists, with on-the-ground first responder capabilities and would serve a key local liaison element for territorial and federal responders. The multi-dimensional approach could be a test model for a Canada-wide community public safety program that would coordinate fast-reaction capabilities designed to respond to a wide range of emergencies from local search and rescue operations and wildfire evacuations to broader threats, demands and dangers. In most instances, the YCPSP would be staffed by Yukon First Nations people, providing a secure and important boost to local economies. Public Safety Canada could be the primary, but not sole, sponsor, with the YCPSP also connected

to civilian agencies in the Yukon and across the country. The new system would, in effect, provide the Yukon with a first-rate system for strategic and defensive oversight and with first responder capabilities to address a broad range of potential threats.

- **Ensuring the Sustainability of Foundational Infrastructure**

In the new calculus of national and regional security, core infrastructure plays a fundamental role. The Yukon, with a continued reliance on diesel fuel for around 20% of its electricity and an increasingly important backup role for renewable energy sources, is vulnerable to energy disruptions. The Yukon, as a sub-Arctic environment vulnerable to extreme cold for several winter months each year, has to protect its existing power systems, expand renewable energy production, and explore emerging technologies, like small modular reactors that could change the dynamics of northern energy. The Yukon has exceptional concerns about food security, which currently relies on highly vulnerable transportation connections to the South. The intraregional transportation and communications have to be maintained to a high civilian and military standard and the newly created territory-wide fibre optics networks will be integral to the proper functioning of government, education, commerce, and health care in the Northwest. In the years ahead, the Yukon and the DND will need to remain vigilant with respect to northern infrastructure to support CAF operations and contribute to the needs of Yukoners.

- **Collaborate with the State of Alaska on the Identification of Supporting Infrastructure for Shipping in the Northwest Passage**

Increasing uncertainties in global shipping combined with global warming has changed perceptions about the future potential of the Northwest Passage. The state and the territory have vested interests in the potential expansion of commercial and other shipping through the Bering Strait and along the northern coast of the Yukon. Planning for this eventuality should include a review of the potential development of port facilities, marine clean-up, and regional maritime surveillance. The Yukon and northern Indigenous communities are increasingly alert to the threats and opportunities in Arctic waters. Proactive and collaborative attention to northern coastlines is urgently required.

- **Engagement with the Western Arctic Maritime Defence Planning**

Protecting the Beaufort Sea and the Northwest Passage has emerged as a necessity for the Government of Canada. The warming of the Arctic has increased the navigation season in the Far North and changed the maritime security environment in the region. With the expansion of northern shipping and a growing number of marine threats to the Canadian Arctic, it is important that Canada be more proactive in planning for the defence of the region. With the Yukon's northern coastline strategically located along the Western Arctic sea lanes and abutting Alaska, the Northern Yukon is Canada's principal window on the Beaufort Sea and the western maritime approaches to our Arctic. The Yukon warrants a seat at national planning and preparation

tables so that the territory can synchronize its Arctic coast investments with national commitments. There are also opportunities to better use the Canadian Rangers in the Yukon to monitor activity in these waters during the open water season, either as part of Operation Nanook Nunakput or a distinct operation in concert with the Canadian Coast Guard.

- **Regional Strategic Communications and Coordination**

Recent responses to climate-related disasters and the February 2022 balloon incident have revealed important shortcomings in communications between national and regional governments. Formal protocols are required to ensure that, in the fast-moving 21st century security environment, Canada, the USA, Alaska, Yukon, British Columbia and Northwest Territories information flows quickly, securely and accurately between jurisdictions. These discussions could – and should – lead to the development of a broader version for infrastructure development, resource use, the reduction of overlap, and the creation of much-needed technological redundancy.

- **Information Coordination and Integrated Security Planning**

The Yukon needs to develop a more systematic understanding of the national and continental security environment. This would include regular briefings (beyond the superficial public commentaries available in recent years) by Canadian and allied military and intelligence agencies. At the same time, regular meetings with the State of Alaska and appropriate Yukon representatives would enhance the Yukon's understanding of and engagement with the continental security environment.

Formal CAF briefings for the Yukon Forum would ensure that Yukon First Nations are aware of the strategic issues animating the Government of Canada's strategic actions, planning and investments.

- **Collaboration with Alaska and CAF/DND (particularly Defence Research Development Canada) on Research Related to Arctic/Winter Military Activities and Infrastructure**

Alaska and the Yukon (on behalf of Canada) should develop regional capacities in arctic and winter training, operations, infrastructure, and equipment. This is an obvious area of expertise development and preparation for the Yukon, particularly if the territory can leverage regional cooperation with the State of Alaska and the United States armed forces in the border region. This could include the development of a Yukon Centre of Excellence for Northern/Arctic Defence Preparedness, perhaps coordinated with other allies.

- **Engaging with Defence Procurement**

The government and people of the Yukon understand that military spending by Canada and its allies must emphasize national and international strategic and defense priorities. There remains however, considerable scope for the participation of Yukon businesses in military procurement. Meetings should be arranged between appropriate Yukon and Yukon First Nations government and business leaders and Government of Canada officials to ensure that Yukoners understand regional and national commercial opportunities in the field. Without a proactive initiative of this sort, Yukon businesses will lose important chances to seize military contracting opportunities.

- **Contributions to Critical Mineral Supply**

The Yukon and the Canadian North more generally have the potential to play a vital role in the assurance of supply of strategic minerals. This would require a marked change in current strategies, which prioritize consultation and complex approval processes over prompt reviews, and would need much greater attention to the commercial and logistical requirements of resource development. This will require extensive work with Yukon First Nations, whose endorsement of a revised approval process is essential to the long-term stability and reliability of northern resource development. It will also require additional sources of energy, for example from new grid connections, hydroelectricity, and potentially small modular reactors in the next decade; and additional port access, perhaps from Skagway, Alaska or further south through British Columbia.

- **Targeting Investment on Large-Scale Military Investments**

In the past, Yukon leaders have floated the idea of large-scale federal investments in Yukon-centred military projects, arguing that the territory was overdue for such a commitment and that the initiative could be justified on strategic and defensive grounds. Specifically, some Yukoners have advocated for a military port, with potential civilian uses, at King Point on the north coast. Similarly, politicians have, at various times, argued for the establishment of a permanent military base in the Yukon (a northern version of Gagetown, New Brunswick, for example). More recently, the commitment of the United States and Canada to NORAD modernization raised the prospect of substantial investment in Yukon facilities. There was hope, in all cases, that investments of this type

would be undertaken with substantial Yukon input, ensuring that the military development would mesh with civilian priorities.

It is highly unlikely that many of these initiatives will be undertaken. On the broader list of national strategic and military requirements, none of these ideas would make the Canadian shortlist, ranking well below the delivery of fighter planes, renewing Canada's naval surface combatant and submarine fleets, air and missile defence capabilities, replacing armoured vehicle fleets, and acquiring surveillance and strike drones and counter-drone capabilities.

National politicians are reluctant to permanently or publicly reject these alternatives for fear of offending northerners. But strong territorial advocacy for positions that are not likely to secure even a modicum of support from the military bureaucracy and strategic planners would undermine the broader credibility of Yukon proposals and limit the prospects for any substantial military investment. Put bluntly, the chances of the Yukon securing a major commitment to traditional military and strategic preparations are comparatively slight, absent clearly stated and urgent requirements from the DND.

- **Maintaining Strategic Vigilance**

The Yukon Arctic Security Advisory Council was created in 2023 to provide guidance to the Government of Yukon about 21st century military and security requirements. This is a crucial initiative, and the Council

was established at an extremely important time. Strategic issues and geopolitical realities change almost monthly. Three years ago, the Russian-Ukraine conflict had not started, relations in the South China sea were tense without being threatening, and the Israel-Hamas conflict was simmering but far from an all-out war. Artificial Intelligence was a scientific possibility but not practically relevant for most people and organizations. Much has now changed – and changed fast. It is highly uncertain what the next three years will bring, let alone a decade and beyond.

The Yukon requires ongoing strategic vigilance and needs to stay alert to national defence and security preparations and investments across the country. Rather than establishing a permanent civil servant unit to look after this large and highly variable field, the Yukon would benefit from the maintenance of the Yukon Arctic Security Advisory Council. Maintaining a small group of subject specialists, with excellent contacts across the country and advanced knowledge of this fast-moving and complex field, will ensure that the Government of Yukon is well informed in an era of dangerous international competition. The Council could be convened virtually three times a year (or more often, as required by national and international circumstances). Following each meeting the Council could provide a written report and/or oral briefing on developments of interest and importance to the Yukon. The Council would give the Yukon access to high quality expertise, advice and planning recommendations on an ongoing basis.

Conclusion

The Government of Yukon clearly understands that even a demographically small and remote jurisdiction is subject to broad and complex geopolitical and military forces and influences. This report considers the opportunities for the Yukon to contribute to national security and defence, providing a realistic and politically informed analysis of what investments are possible and appropriate for the territory. The Yukon Arctic Security Advisory Council is of the view that the Yukon should not expect a massive influx of investment or attention from the Canadian military, but that it can and should play a leading role in defining northern security and defence priorities to meet the realities of the 21st century.

