Teaching Unit Number 7 - Cold War on Canadian Soil

Network in Canadian History and Environment (NiCHE) - Environmental History
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This university-level teaching unit is designed to be easily scaled up or down regarding class time consumed, or difficulty, as appropriate for the individual course context. The material in this unit has a strict focus on Canada (specifically the north), though instructors in other locations are encouraged to improvise on their own, using this module as a base, to insert a comparative element and make connections to other places or themes.

Learning goals.
- Introduce the theme of high modernist militarism
- Contextualize shifting Canada/US relations, the militarization of Canada’s north, and its attendant environmental impacts
- Familiarize the student with archival sources that inform militarization narratives
- Encourage students to connect these concepts with their own experience of the world

This teaching unit is composed of six resources:
- An open source journal article, to be assigned as a reading
- Discussion questions focused on the reading
- A contextual essay, around which instructors can build their own lectures, or share with Teaching Assistants working outside of their area of expertise
- Primary sources, to be deployed as best suits the purposes of the instructor
- Supporting texts, images and video, related to the open source journal article
- A glossary of “Canadian” terms and concepts, to support a non-Canadian, international audience

Resources:
   <http://envhis.oxfordjournals.org/content/12/4/920.full.pdf+html>

2) Discussion Questions.
Q. How did the threat to the Canadian North, and the notion of security, change over time? How has the valuation of this land mass changed?
Q. What is meant by the title “The Cold War on Canadian Soil”? How did Canada's international policy play out within a national stage and in what ways did military, environmental, and cultural interests diverge?

Q. In the initial Cold War period, the Canadian North is characterized as a hostile environment that must be overcome. Later, it is described as a terrain that must be protected. Why does this change in representation occur? How does it relate to concepts of high modernism, environmentalism, militarism, and nationalism?

Q. Lackenbauer and Farish argue that in the research of military geography, little has been written outside of the scope of “terrain and tactics.” In what ways do they expand the parameters of research by considering the interconnections between military and environmental history? What sorts of information would be overlooked in a more traditional approach?

Q. According to Lackenbauer and Farish, both the Canadian government and the aboriginal peoples of the North invoked the protection of the environment to justify their respective positions and policies on the region. This environmental messaging was put forth in different ways, for different reasons, to different ends. Compare and contrast the two narratives.

Q. Lackenbauer and Farish draw upon James C. Scott's seminal work Seeing Like a State to suggest that the Canadian state's high modernist stance created a blind spot with regard to local knowledge in the Canadian North. In what ways do they understand this conflict to play out, and how might the theory explain different assessments of environmental health?

Q. What is Arctic Sovereignty and how is it asserted by the Canadian government today? Consider the use of both tangible and symbolic demarcations of the land and modes of defense.

Q. Compare the shifting impressions of the north described in this article with those described by Stephen Bocking in his piece, “Science and spaces in the northern environment” (see Teaching Unit Number 5, in “Teaching EH: Canada” <http://environmentalhistory.net/teaching-eh/nr-5-science-and-spaces/>). What are the points of agreement? Where do they diverge?

3) Contextual Essay
Lackenbauer and Farish's article traces shifting military understandings of the Canadian North. The authors argue that Cold War Canadian (and perhaps American) military minds treated the north both as an opponent and a resource to be used, possibly to advantage, with the correct knowledge and training.

To achieve their goal of linking Canadian environmental history with military and diplomatic history, the authors draw together material from three distinct literatures: that
of the military in the Canadian North, the literature on militarization and the environment, and that of military modernization. In the process they provide an analysis of four interwoven themes: military perceptions of the north, Canadian national interests in the north, northern environmental impacts, and, by extension, they provide a muted commentary on Canada/US relations.

Foundational to their piece is James C Scott’s 1998 Seeing Like a State.1 Students not already familiar with the principles of modernity and modernization theory will benefit from an introductory lecture on these topics, before reading the article.

As a reminder for the instructor, Scott argues that the most tragic episodes of twentieth-century state-sponsored social engineering originate in a combination of four elements. These are:

1) An administrative ordering of nature and society;
2) A high modernist ideology. Scott elaborates on this element to include a strong self-confidence about scientific and technical progress; expansion of production; growing satisfaction of human needs; mastery of nature (including human nature); and the rational design of social order commensurate with the scientific understanding of natural laws. Scott cautions that a high modernist ideology ought not to be confused for scientific practice, but that the former borrowed the legitimacy of science and technology;
3) An authoritarian state, willing to use coercive power to bring high modernist plans into being (typically exercised in times of war);
4) A prostate civil society lacking the ability to resist these plans.2

Scott’s template provides a good fit for the current case, which was an application of state-sponsored science and technology, during a time of cold war, over the protestations of colonized Native peoples subsisting in a fur-based economy.

Military perceptions of the north
At the beginning of the period, the north was an environment to be survived, an exposed flank rather than something to be protected in and of itself. By the late 1960s the north ceased to be a hostile environment, but became something to be engineered for strategic purposes. By the 1970s, it had become a place demanding protection from environmental and jurisdictional threats. The popular impression that Native people might need protection from the military itself came to the fore in the debates over low-level flight training and cruise missile testing in the early 1980s.

In Lackenbauer and Farish’s application of Scott’s ideas, the state (or in this case two states, Canada and the US) work to simplify the northern landscape and make it legible, thus enrolling it more effectively into militarization. The two countries accomplished this through projects backed by the authority of reason and the latest technologies, designed at a distance and implemented without sufficient attention to local conditions.

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2 Scott, 4.
The authors note that historians of modernization theory have demonstrated how its claims to objectivity were compromised by its Cold War origins and applications. “The immediacy of geopolitical conflict meant that grandiose theories of democratization and economic liberalization often ran counter to seemingly necessary military incursions.” In practical terms, Native peoples were asked to sacrifice their livelihoods and security for the security of distant Southerners.

National Interests in the North
Before the Second World War, the Canadian government used the military as a tool to support national development programs in the North, with a resulting insubstantial military presence. Through the Second World War, the Canadian military supported American interests in securing reliable access to Alaska (through Canada via the Alaska Highway), and in the air via the Northwest Airway and the Northwest Staging Route. Canada came under much pressure to share information with the US, as well as space for military exercises. By the late 1950s, new technologies, particularly intercontinental ballistic missiles, redirected attention away from the region and Canadian military activities declined sharply.

Pierre Trudeau’s election in 1968 signaled a new era. Uncomfortable with Canada’s “helpful fixer” role abroad, the new Prime Minister scaled back NATO commitments and reshuffled military priorities to highlight sovereignty protection and continental defense. He was interested in northern development and rediscovered a role for the Canadian Forces in protecting Arctic sovereignty. Not from Soviet invasion, but from the challenge to Canadian claims by the US. A delicate arctic thus became a convenient pretext to extend Canadian jurisdiction northward, and the government took direct action to securitize the region [note that this notion of increased ecological fragility is in direct contrast to Bocking’s portrayal (see Teaching Unit Number 5 <http://environmentalhistory.net/teaching-eh/nr-5-science-and-spaces/>, that after the 1970s, the north lost its aura of a fragile ecology, and assumed the role of capable resource hinterland if managed properly by modern methods].

American forays across the northwest passage precipitated heightened Canadian interest in the north; however, the collapse of the Soviet bloc in 1989 meant that Canadian military interest again shifted elsewhere, in a time when human security and environmental security became inseparable.

Environmental Impacts in the North
Construction of the Distant Early Warning radar line (the DEW line) in the late 1950s altered Northerners’ lives more than any other initiative. It was an enormous engineering undertaking. The DEW Line’s construction drew the Inuit into closer contact with the south, for both better and worse. In Alberta, bombing ranges and low level flight training had deleterious effects on trapping. Overall, the effects of vehicles, sewage, the disruption of local social orders, over-hunting by military personnel, and aircraft buzzing caribou all characterize the period. By 1964 however, half of the DEW line radar stations were decommissioned, transferring the infrastructure (and environmental liability) away from the military and over to the Department of Indian and Northern
By the 1980s, low-level flight testing threatened aboriginal identities, the health of their communities, and their traditional territory. However, with the collapse of the Soviet bloc in 1989, Canadian priorities shifted away from the eastern sub-Arctic.

The bill for mitigating Cold War military impacts since the 1990s has been staggering, including problems at the Goose Bay airbase and scattered DEW Line sites. Since the mess was a product of bilateral continental defense schemes, the Canadian government hoped that the US would pay for most of it; this was disallowed by a concerned US Congress fearful of the precedent it might set. Since the 1990s, military activity has been devoted to dealing with its environmental history, constraining budgets for contemporary operations.

Additional Sources


Beacon Station [temporarray navigational aid] on Southampton Is. east coast for convoy to Foxe Main site [new DEW Line site at Hall Beach], summer 1955 [men and supplies outside khaki fabric-covered quonset hut], 1955.
Nunavut Archives/Douglas Wilkinson fonds/–1979-051: 1317S
<http://www.nwtarchives.ca/item_display.asp?Accession_Number=N-1979-051&Item_Number=1317S>

Cam 4 DEW Line site complex. Communication dish (site to site), communication tower and radome. Pelly Bay. 2-5-60. 1960.
Nunavut Archives/Douglas Wilkinson fonds/N-1979-051: 1507
<http://www.nwtarchives.ca/item_display.asp?Accession_Number=N-1979-051&Item_Number=1507>

Cam 4 DEW Line site complex with radome and communication antenna, north side. Pelly Bay. 2-5-60. 1960
Nunavut Archives/Douglas Wilkinson fonds/N-1979-051: 1506
<http://www.nwtarchives.ca/item_display.asp?Accession_Number=N-1979-051&Item_Number=1506>

Cam 4 DEW Line site complex, photo taken from nearby communication tower. Radome on right. Looking south east. Pelly Bay. 2-5-60. 1960.
Nunavut Archives/Douglas Wilkinson fonds/N-1979-051: 1510
<http://www.nwtarchives.ca/item_display.asp?Accession_Number=N-1979-051&Item_Number=1510>

Nunavut Archives/Douglas Wilkinson fonds/N-1979-051: 1519
<http://www.nwtarchives.ca/item_display.asp?Accession_Number=N-1979-051&Item_Number=1519>

Radome and communication dishes - main module in the background. Cam 4 DEW Line site. Pelly Bay. 2-5-60. 1960.
Nunavut Archives/Douglas Wilkinson fonds/N-1979-051: 1531
<http://www.nwtarchives.ca/item_display.asp?Accession_Number=N-1979-051&Item_Number=1531>

Cam 3 DEW Line site, winter ca. 1960 [radar dome, satellite dish and radio tower].
<http://www.nwtarchives.ca/item_display.asp?Accession_Number=N-1979-051&Item_Number=1968S>
Dew line Cambridge Bay [Photo taken by Tessa Macintosh], 1983.
NWT Archives/Northwest Territories. Dept. of Public Works and Services fonds/G-1995-001: 0331
<http://www.nwtarchives.ca/item_display.asp?Accession_Number=G-1995-001&Item_Number=0331>

Cambridge Bay-Dew Line [Photo taken by Tessa Macintosh], 1984.
NWT Archives/Northwest Territories. Dept. of Public Works and Services fonds/G-1995-001: 2902
<http://www.nwtarchives.ca/item_display.asp?Accession_Number=G-1995-001&Item_Number=2902>

Tuktoyuktuk DEW line [Photo taken by Tessa Macintosh], 1987.
NWT Archives/Northwest Territories. Dept. of Public Works and Services fonds/G-1995-001: 4463
<http://www.nwtarchives.ca/item_display.asp?Accession_Number=G-1995-001&Item_Number=4463>

Pelly Bay DEW Line Station [Photo taken by DND], 1984.
NWT Archives/Northwest Territories. Dept. of Public Works and Services fonds/G-1995-001: 3416
<http://www.nwtarchives.ca/item_display.asp?Accession_Number=G-1995-001&Item_Number=3416>

DEW Line - Tuktoyuktuk [Photo taken by Tessa Macintosh], 1987.
NWT Archives/Northwest Territories. Dept. of Public Works and Services fonds/G-1995-001: 4417
<http://www.nwtarchives.ca/item_display.asp?Accession_Number=G-1995-001&Item_Number=4417>

DEW line station Tuk aerial [Photo taken by Tessa Macintosh], 1992.
NWT Archives/Northwest Territories. Dept. of Public Works and Services fonds/G-1995-001: 7893
<http://www.nwtarchives.ca/item_display.asp?Accession_Number=G-1995-001&Item_Number=7893>

Coral Harbour [Photo taken by Lorne Smith], 1990?
NWT Archives/Northwest Territories. Dept. of Public Works and Services fonds/G-1995-001: 1004
<http://www.nwtarchives.ca/item_display.asp?Accession_Number=G-1995-001&Item_Number=1004>
Elizabeth Nibgeasi - Eskimo Point [Inuit woman in decorated parka] [Photo taken by Tessa Macintosh], 1988.
NWT Archives/Northwest Territories. Dept. of Public Works and Services fonds/G-1995-001: 1316
<http://www.nwtarchives.ca/item_display.asp?Accession_Number=G-1995-001&Item_Number=1316>

5) Video Resources
“Norad’s goal: deter, detect, defend” (1957). 3 min 37 s.
<http://www.cbc.ca/player/Digital+Archives/War+and+Conflict/Defence/ID/1516476163/?page=3>

“Cruise missile testing coming to Canada” (1983). 3 min 10 s.
<http://www.cbc.ca/player/Digital+Archives/War+and+Conflict/Defence/ID/1724091649/?page=2> (Also available at <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=B3KhWuYiWRs>)

“Flying F-16 in 1984: Low level Goose Bay & Aerial Refueling.” 8MM footage.
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ETfqLfeFVo>

“DEW Line: Canada is cleaning up pollution caused by Cold War radar stations in the Arctic” (2012). Text and multiple videos.
<http://www.thestar.com/news/insight/2012/08/04/dew_line_canada_is_cleaning_up_pollution CAUSED BY_COLD_WAR_RADAR_STATIONS_IN_THE_ARCTIC.html>

An American video, which might be a nice supplement to the above photos that gives a very clear idea of the large quantity of material transported to the north, and why it left a toxic legacy.
“DEW Line Story” (1958). 27 min 32 s.
<http://archive.org/details/0575_DEW_Line_Story_20_01_02_00>

6) Glossary
Permafrost: Permafrost is ground remaining at or below 0°C continuously for at least 2 years.

Sheshatshit (pronounced sheshashiu): An Innu federal reserve (likely known to Americans as a reservation) in the province of Newfoundland and Labrador. It is located outside the community of Goose Bay.

Meech Lake Constitutional Accord: The Canadian constitution was patriated from Britain in 1982. At the time, the Québec government refused to sign the constitution (though in practice it is adhered to). This phrase “Meech Lake accord” refers to a failed attempt by Brian Mulroney’s conservative federal government, in 1987, to entice Québec to sign the constitution.
Oka conflict: A three-month standoff at Oka, Québec, in 1990, between Mohawk protestors, police and the Canadian army. At the heart of the crisis was the proposed expansion of a golf course and development of condominiums on disputed land that included a Mohawk burial ground.

DIAND: Department of Indian Affairs and Northern Development.

DND: The Canadian Department of National Defence.

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Dr. David Brownstein, Klahanie Research Ltd. (http://www.klahanieresearch.ca/)
NiCHE (http://niche-canada.org/)
Oxford University Press (oup.com)
National Film Board of Canada (https://www.nfb.ca/)
American Society for Environmental History (aseh.net)
Forest History Society (foressthistory.org)