Plans for Canada’s next generation of Arctic patrol ships were finally revealed in March. Work on the first of the vessels that will make up this new fleet will begin in September. Expected to cost $3.5 billion, the ships are a step towards fulfilling a promise that Prime Minister Stephen Harper made eight years ago to stand up for Canada’s rights in the north.

“Canada has a choice when it comes to defending our sovereignty over the Arctic. We either use it or lose it. And make no mistake, this government intends to use it,” Mr. Harper said when first announcing plans for the ships in 2007.

**The True North**

Yukon, the Northwest Territories and Nunavut make up 40 percent of Canada’s land mass, but in these northern regions, people are outnumbered three to one by caribou.

The tundra is cold and inhospitable. The Arctic Ocean freezes up. There are few roads or ports or services. Supplies must be flown or shipped in, so the cost of living is very high. So is unemployment. So what, exactly, is the Prime Minister defending?

**Treasure Hunt**

Although the Arctic is cold and isolated, under the snow, ice and ocean could rest a quarter of the world’s energy resources. Because of climate change, this “buried treasure” is getting easier to reach and remove. The ice coverage is melting twice as fast as predicted and, this year, it hit an all-time low. Scientists believe an ice-free Arctic summer could...
come as early as 2020 – and the Canadian government wants to be ready to protect, and possibly to begin harvesting, the wealth that’s currently buried in the North.

**Coming through**

As the ice withdraws, shipping lanes are also opening up. The fabled Northwest Passage could soon become a well-travelled shortcut connecting the Pacific and Atlantic Oceans.

When ice choked the passage, Canada’s historic claim to this route went unchallenged. However, as the marine traffic in this part of the world increases, our country stands a very real chance of losing control of these waters.

The U.S., for one, doesn’t recognize our sovereignty over the Northwest Passage, which it calls “an international strait.” Already our American neighbours have sent oil tankers through without asking Canada’s permission.

**Taking ownership**

In 2007, just 18 months after first being elected Prime Minister, Stephen Harper made his first of what have become annual, very public, August visits to the Arctic. The Prime Minister’s northern tours are timed to coincide with the Canadian Forces’ yearly search-and-rescue exercise called Operation Nanook. A primary purpose of these events is to show the nation, and the world, that this region belongs to Canada.

“It is no exaggeration to say that the need to assert our sovereignty and protect our territorial integrity in the Arctic – on our terms – has never been more urgent,” the Prime Minister said.

**“USE IT OR LOSE IT”**

In 2010, the federal government announced a 30-year plan to rebuild Canada’s outdated Royal Canadian Navy and Canadian Coast Guard fleets. This $35-billion National Shipbuilding Procurement Strategy aims to supply the navy with five or six Arctic/Offshore Patrol Ships (AOPS), 15 combat ships and three naval support ships. The coast guard will receive four new science vessels and a heavy icebreaker.

Iring Shipbuilding is building the patrol and combat ships. The Halifax shipyard will deliver the first AOPS – known as Harry DeWolf-class offshore patrol vessels – in 2018. The last of these ships will be completed by 2022.

**Watchdogs**

At 103 metres, the Arctic patrol ships are almost twice as large as the vessels they are replacing. They will carry rescue boats, ATVs and snowmobiles, and can land a helicopter. Although not as hardy as an icebreaker, these “slushbreakers” can cut through one-metre, first-year ice.

A deep-water refuelling facility in the heart of the Arctic Archipelago will support the new patrol vessels. Nanisivik, a former mining port, needs jetty improvements, a helicopter pad and fuel tanks, but it will be spruced up by the time the first ship is launched.

The AOPS will patrol the Northwest Passage during the shipping season. The rest of the year they will stand guard at the eastern and western approaches to the Arctic shortcut, quietly asserting Canada’s sovereignty over a very significant region of our country.

“Canada’s Arctic is central to our identity as a northern nation. It is part of our history and it represents the tremendous potential of our future,” stated Mr. Harper. ★

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**Definitions**

**Archipelago**: sea or stretch of water containing many islands.

**Canada’s in the Arctic has 36,000 islands – and 14,000 people.**

**Jetty**: a landing stage or small pier at which boats can dock or be moored.

**Northwest Passage**: a sea route through the Arctic Ocean, along the northern coast of North America via waterways through the Canadian Arctic Archipelago, connecting the Atlantic and Pacific Oceans.
ON THE LINES

Answer the following in complete sentences:

1. List at least four important facts about Canada’s ‘True North.’

2. What is the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea and what ownership rules did it establish?

3. List the three contested claims in the Arctic that involve Canada.

4. Why is the federal government interested in defending Canadian sovereignty in the Arctic?

5. Explain what the National Shipbuilding Procurement Strategy is.

6. Describe the six new AOPS vessels.

7. How will these ships will be used?

8. Which company will build these ships?

9. List one other way that Canada is trying to defend its Arctic sovereignty.
BETWEEN THE LINES

An inference is a conclusion drawn from evidence. A plausible inference is supported by evidence in the article and is consistent with known facts outside of the article.

What inference(s) can you draw from the fact that the United States doesn’t recognize Canada’s sovereignty over the Northwest Passage?

BEYOND THE LINES

The Ottawa Declaration of 1996 formally established the Arctic Council as a high level intergovernmental forum to provide a means for promoting cooperation, coordination and interaction among the Arctic States, with the involvement of the Arctic Indigenous communities and other Arctic inhabitants on common Arctic issues, in particular issues of sustainable development and environmental protection in the Arctic. Learn more about this organization at http://www.arctic-council.org/index.php/en/

JUST TALK ABOUT IT

1. For what reasons do you agree with the federal government’s $35-billion, 30-year naval plan? For what reasons do you disagree? Explain.

2. If you were the Prime Minister, how would you handle the issue of defending Canada’s sovereignty in the Arctic? Give reasons to support your response.

ONLINE

Visit our student website at www.news4youth.com and click on the What in the World? tab to:

1. Watch a GlobeNational report on YouTube called “Arctic Military Exercise Sends Political Message” that features one of Stephen Harper’s trips to the north and a rare look at Canada’s elite Joint Task Force 2 soldiers in action (or visit https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PZfSpY3HTIk).

2. Learn about a different idea for patrolling the Northwest Passage: Sea-Drones (or visit http://www.theglobeandmail.com/globe-drive/culture/technology/sea-drone-concept-would-patrol-the-northwest-passage/article21217296/).

3. Read about Santa’s passport Christmas present – and don’t miss all of the great Arctic links at the bottom of the article! (or visit http://www.theglobeandmail.com/news/politics/canada-issues-santa-claus-a-passport/article16072973/).
Complete this map assignment to better understand the article *Canada's Arctic Ambitions*.

**INSTRUCTIONS**

1. Obtain the required resources and read all the instructions before starting.

2. Colour your map after all labelling is completed.

3. Print in pencil only first, then go over the printing in black ink.

4. Work carefully and neatly.

Resources Required: pencil, black pen, pencil crayons, ruler, eraser and an atlas.

**Part A** Locate and label the following territories and countries in CAPITAL letters and shade each as indicated:

- Canada (yellow)
- Greenland [Denmark] (green)
- Iceland (red)
- Finland (brown)
- Norway (orange)
- Sweden (purple)
- Russia (pink)
- Alaska [United States] (red)

**Part B** Locate and label the following islands:

- Ellesmere Island
- Victoria Island
- Baffin Island
- Novaya Zemlya
- Svalbard

**Part C** Locate and label the following salt water bodies and shade all ocean water dark blue:

- Pacific Ocean
- Sea of Okhotsk
- Bering Sea
- Bering Strait
- Gulf of Alaska
- Beaufort Sea
- Arctic Ocean
- Baffin Bay
- Davis Strait
- Denmark Strait
- Greenland Sea
- Norwegian Sea
- Atlantic Ocean
- Barents Sea
- Laptev Sea

**Part D** Locate and label the North Pole.

**Part E** Locate and label the ‘Average extent of sea ice’ and shade this area using this pattern:

**Part F** Locate and label the ‘Northwest Passage’.

**Part G** Draw and label the following lines of latitude and longitude:

- Arctic Circle (66° N)
- Prime Meridian (0°)

**Part H** Shade all remaining territory grey.

**Part I** Complete your map with a frame and title. ★