

## SATELLITE SALE

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Stephen Harper talks a fine game on Arctic sovereignty. He's told Canadians that we need to "use it or lose it." He's publicly berated U.S. Ambassador David Wilkins over the status of the Northwest Passage. He's even promised to build a deepwater dock on northern Baffin Island and ice-strengthened patrol vessels for the Canadian Navy.

It's mostly just words. The dock already exists. The contracts for the ships won't be signed until next year. As a result, it's been difficult to tell whether Harper's commitment to Arctic sovereignty is anything more than cynical electioneering.

We'll soon find out, thanks to Macdonald Dettwiler & Associates, Canada's leading aerospace company. MDA has just decided to sell its space program to Alliant Techsystems, a large U.S. arms manufacturer.

The sale includes Radarsat-2, a remote sensing satellite that provides imagery of remarkably high definition, even at night and through clouds. It's the perfect tool for monitoring crops and forests, studying the effects of climate change, tracking ships at sea, and mapping Arctic sea ice.

Launched into orbit just last month, Radarsat-2 was developed through a partnership between MDA and the Canadian Space Agency, with Canadian taxpayers paying \$445 million or about 85 per cent of the total cost.

In return for its investment, the Canadian government was promised large amounts of imagery as well as "priority access" to Radarsat-2 in emergencies. These might include floods, forest fires, oil spills – or a suspect vessel entering Canada's North.

Indeed, the Canadian Ice Service has been the largest domestic user of Radarsat-2's less powerful predecessor, Radarsat-1. The Department of National Defence, Public Safety Canada, Natural Resources Canada and the Department of Foreign Affairs have all relied on this Canadian owned and controlled technology.

With the Northwest Passage rapidly opening due to climate change, Radarsat-2 has become an essential tool in upholding Arctic sovereignty.

Being able to monitor ships from space, and map the presence and thickness of any remaining ice, is a necessary complement to having naval patrol vessels, Coast Guard icebreakers or helicopters available to interdict foreign vessels.

Shockingly, Canadians began to lose control over Radarsat-2 before it was even built. When Jean Chrétien decided to privatize the construction process in 1998, MDA started marketing the satellite's capabilities to defence contractors and foreign militaries. Six years later, the company announced a deal with the U.S. air force to support "in-theatre support for the war fighter."

Once Radarsat-2 is sold to Alliant Techsystems, the United States will likely replace Canada as the country with licensing authority over it. Ottawa's ability to control what the satellite is used for – and to commandeer the equipment in emergencies – will be lost.

Worse yet, the U.S. government will be able to use a Canadian-funded satellite in ways that directly contradict Canada's interests. Suppose that the United States sends a ship into the Northwest Passage without Canada's consent. Or that it attacks Iran in the absence of UN authorization or a truly imminent threat. In both instances, Radarsat-2 imagery would facilitate American law-breaking.

Then there is the issue of maintaining a Canadian aerospace industry. Government support for the development of Radarsat-2 was partly motivated by the desire to maintain and create thousands of well-paid jobs.

In a media information package released just before the satellite's launch, MDA asserted that "the Radarsat-2 program underscores Canada's strength and leadership in the development, operation and marketing of advanced Earth Observation technologies and applications." Today, with \$1.2 billion on the table, the company seems happy to eat its words.

The Harper government recently announced that it will introduce legislation enabling foreign investments to be blocked if they are contrary to Canada's national security interests. The move is directed primarily at Chinese state-owned companies investing in the Alberta tar sands. But a similar concern should prompt the Prime Minister to block the Radarsat-2 sale.

In this instance, Harper already has the necessary powers. The 2005 Remote Sensing Space Systems Act, enacted especially for Radarsat-2, requires that the foreign affairs minister approve any transfer of the satellite's licence. In making his decision, the minister "shall have regard to national security (and) the defence of Canada."

It is inconceivable that any cabinet minister would make such an important decision on his own. On this, as with so many other issues, the buck stops with the PM.

So tell us, Mr. Harper, is "use it or lose it" principle or politics? When it comes to Arctic sovereignty, can we take you at your word?

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