Plans for Canada’s next generation of Arctic patrol ships were revealed in March. Work on the new vessels will begin in September.

The ships help fulfill a promise that Prime Minister Stephen Harper made eight years ago. He said he would 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,” Mr. Harper said.

**The True North**

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

The tundra is cold and unwelcoming. 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 what, exactly, is the Prime Minister defending?

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**Definitions**

**Continental Shelf:** the area of seabed around a large landmass where the sea is relatively shallow compared with the open ocean. The continental shelf is geologically part of the continental crust.

**Sovereignty:** ownership

**Tundra:** a vast, flat, treeless Arctic region of Europe, Asia, and North America where the subsoil is permanently frozen
Treasure Hunt
One-quarter of the world’s energy resources may be resting under the Arctic snow, ice and ocean. However, climate change is causing this ice cover to melt, and scientists believe the Arctic summer could be ice-free as early as 2020. That means that the North’s ‘buried treasure’ is getting easier to reach and remove. The Canadian government wants to be ready to protect, and possibly to begin harvesting, these resources.

Coming Through
As the ice withdraws, shipping lanes are opening up, too. Canada’s fabled Northwest Passage could soon become a well-used shortcut connecting the Pacific and Atlantic Oceans. However, the U.S., for one, doesn’t recognize our sovereignty over this route. Already our American neighbours have sent oil tankers through without asking Canada’s permission.

Taking Ownership
Since 2007, Mr. Harper has been making annual visits to the Arctic. A primary purpose of these northern tours is to show the world that this region belongs to Canada. But it will be up to the navy, using the six Arctic/Offshore Patrol Ships (AOPS) currently being built, to actually enforce Canada’s northern claims.

The Overall Plan
The AOPS were announced in 2010 as part of the federal government’s 30-year plan to rebuild Canada’s outdated Royal Canadian Navy and Coast Guard fleets. The $35-billion National Shipbuilding Procurement Strategy will also supply the navy with 15 combat ships and three naval support ships. The coast guard will receive four new science vessels and a heavy icebreaker.

Irving Shipbuilding in Halifax is making the AOPS, and will deliver them between 2018 and 2022. At 103 metres, the ships are almost twice as large as the vessels they will replace. They’ll carry rescue boats, ATVs and snowmobiles, and can land a helicopter.

Watchdogs
The new ships 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 shortcut.

"Canada’s Arctic is part of our history. It represents the tremendous potential of our future," stated Mr. Harper.

Climate Change
Why is the climate changing, causing ice melt in the Arctic and extreme weather elsewhere? Because of human activity.

Earth’s natural warming system – known as the greenhouse effect – has been out of balance for 200 years. More greenhouse gases that trap the sun’s heat are gathering in the atmosphere than naturally exist there.

Fossil fuels that run cars, heat homes and make goods send the emissions into the atmosphere. Garbage releases methane gas too. Felling trees that absorb these gases adds to the problem.

In the Arctic, as temperatures rise, the polar ice cap shrinks. Dark seawater replaces the white reflective ice. The water absorbs the sun’s heat instead of bouncing it back.

Scientists say we must slow climate change by reducing the greenhouse gases we’re putting into the atmosphere. Our actions will make a difference.

Definitions
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.
Answer the following in complete sentences:

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

2. How many countries have signed the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea?

3. How much territory is allocated to each country under the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea?

4. How much of the world’s energy resources may be in the Arctic region?

5. Which water route is an important shortcut connecting the Pacific and Atlantic Oceans?

6. When was the National Shipbuilding Procurement Strategy announced and how much will it cost?

7. Explain the purpose of the National Shipbuilding and Procurement Strategy.

8. Describe the six new AOPS.

9. How will the AOPS will be used?
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?

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=PZfsY3HTIk).

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/). ★
MAP ASSIGNMENT

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
- Bering Sea
- Bering Strait
- Gulf of Alaska
- Beaufort Sea
- Arctic Ocean
- Baffin Bay
- Davis Strait
- Denmark Strait
- Greenland Sea
- Atlantic Ocean
- Barents 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** Locate and label the Arctic Circle (66° N)

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

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