

# Climate change heats up Arctic geopolitics

AFP, Montreal

Global warming has the United States and Canada scrambling to overhaul their strategies for controlling North America's vast Arctic, as sea passage grows easier and natural gas resources beckon.

Ice melt in Canada's Great North already allows boat traffic in the Northwest Passage, long the definition of a difficult route between the Atlantic and Pacific through the Arctic, which cuts the sea travel distance between Europe and Asia by a third.

This tortuous route however should be open almost half of the year by around 2035. That could foster cooperation, or turbo-charge turf squabbles between Canada and the United States, whose claim on the Arctic is its state of Alaska.

There is already a history of rivalry between the two generally friendly neighbours over the passage.

The United States considers the

passage international waters free to navigation.

But Canada rejects the argument, and has always defended tooth-and-nail its "sovereignty" over the passage and what it sees as its territorial waters.

"The Northwest Passage issue is not a Canada-US issue; the European Union, Russia and others have the same concerns as we have," Evan Bloom, deputy director for polar affairs at the US State Department, told AFP.

The United States and Canada in the 1980s signed an agreement allowing US ice-breaker ships through what Ottawa maintains are Canadian waters.

"There are problems with this agreement, because no reference was made to submarines or commercial craft," said Joel Plouffe, a researcher at the University of Quebec at Montreal who recently organized a discussion in Montreal on growing US interest in the Arctic.

Mead Treadwell, chairman of the US Arctic Research

Commission, says the current agreement is not enough.

"We've promised not to send icebreakers without consultation first. (But) if you stop there, then you are not addressing the real issue, which is, some third nation may sail through and leave oil on both our soils," he said.

In the future, the Northwest Passage could become an increasingly busy commercial or cruise route, as traffic grows alongside interest in North American Arctic mining, oil and natural gas resources.

The biggest US oil field is at Prudhoe Bay, Alaska, and a huge natural gas project is planned for Canada's Northwest Territories, which could end up boosting traffic in the area.

And that is without factoring in development of what Treadwell noted is "the largest (proven) natural gas field in North America, and not yet developed."

Canada and the United States now need to agree on the precise demarcation of their border in the

area, and on a formula for resource sharing and burden-sharing, such as patrolling the waters for security reasons, researchers say.

"There is no way the US wants the (passage to) become free for Pyongyang to deliver weapons" to another country, said Michael Byers, an international relations expert at the University of British Columbia.

Canadian forces are wrapping up an operation in the Northwest Territories to affirm Canadian sovereignty in the north and counter a simulated terrorist threat to oil production and transport infrastructure.

Byers predicted that potential for terror strikes, environmental disasters and illegal migration in this vast no-man's land ultimately will lead the United States to recognize Canadian sovereignty in these waters perhaps in exchange for guaranteed access for US ships without having to request permission from Ottawa.

"This is an open back door," Byers said.



PHOTO: AFP

Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov (R) speaks at a press conference with Norwegian Foreign Minister Jonas Gahr Støre during the informal meeting of Nato foreign ministers in Oslo yesterday.

## No 'serious debate' ahead of Iraq invasion

Says ex-CIA chief

AFP, Washington

Former CIA director George Tenet says in a new book that there was no serious debate within the US administration ahead of the 2003 invasion of Iraq, according to US media reports Friday.

Tenet, who led the Central Intelligence Agency in the runup to and after the war launched to eliminate the alleged threat of Iraqi weapons of mass destruction, also says he was scapegoated by the White House when no WMD were found in Iraq.

In his book "At the Center of the Storm," to be published Monday, Tenet defends his own role in the decision to attack Iraq while blasting Vice President Dick Cheney and other US officials, the New York Times reported Friday after it obtained a copy of the book.

"There was never a serious debate that I know of within the administration about the imminence of the Iraqi threat," Tenet writes.

He also said, according to the Times, that the administration of President George W Bush never undertook a "serious discussion" about the option of containing Iraq without resorting to an attack.

In the book and in an interview with CBS News to be broadcast Sunday, Tenet also lashes out at Cheney and others for citing his use of the basketball term "slam dunk" -- suggesting incontestable -- to describe the intelligence used to justify the invasion of Iraq.

Tenet says he did use the phrase in a White House discussion ahead of the war, but only about how to make the case to the US people about the need to send US troops to Iraq.

However, he said, administration officials told writer Bob Woodward that he said "It's a slam-dunk case" for the CIA's evidence that Iraqi leader Saddam Hussein had stockpiled WMD.

After Woodward wrote that in his 2004 book "Plan of Attack," the

blame for the failure of pre-war intelligence was directed straight at Tenet, with Cheney repeatedly citing his "slam-dunk" phrase in interviews and speeches.

"Rather than acknowledge responsibility, the administration's message was: Don't blame us. George Tenet got us into this mess," Tenet writes.

"It's the most despicable thing that ever happened to me," he told CBS.

Even so, the Times reports, Tenet takes some blame for the key 2002 US intelligence study which strongly asserted that Hussein was producing dangerous WMDs.

"In retrospect, we got it wrong partly because the truth was so implausible," he writes.

In his CBS interview, excerpts of which were released Thursday, Tenet also defends CIA treatment of "high value detainees" in the war on terror against widespread accusations that torture techniques like waterboarding were used to extract information.

## Germany wants to become world leader in energy efficiency

AFP, Berlin

Germany on Thursday unveiled proposals to cut carbon dioxide emissions by 40 percent within 13 years and become the most energy-efficient country in the world.

Environment Minister Sigmar Gabriel called for additional investment of three billion euros (four billion dollars) to develop energy-saving technologies and said emissions permits for industry could be auctioned off rather than being given away for free.

The minister told the lower house of parliament, the Bundestag, that Germany, Europe's biggest economy, needed to improve its energy efficiency performance by three percent a year in order to meet the EU target of reducing carbon dioxide (CO2) emissions by 20 to 30 percent by 2020.

Gabriel said he wanted to enlist industry's help in chasing the more ambitious target of a 40-percent reduction in CO2, the principal greenhouse gas.

"We should set ourselves the goal of making Germany the most energy-efficient country in the world," he told MPs.

The action plan he presented foresees an 11-percent reduction in electricity use by 2020. Modernising power stations would create savings of 30 million tonnes of CO2, he said.

Gabriel told Bild newspaper on Thursday that he intended to make travel on the country's extensive rail network cheaper to entice passengers off short-haul flights.

"We must make sure that train services are able to compete with air travel," he said, explaining that rail tickets should qualify for a reduced rate of value-added, or sales, tax.

"There is no tax on airline fuel, but the rail operator must pay the full value-added tax on the sale of long-distance tickets. That is unfair and cannot remain that way," Gabriel said.

Value-added tax in Germany rose to 19 percent from 16 percent from January this year.

The domestic flight market in Germany is highly competitive and tickets often cost less than train fares for the same journey.



PHOTO: AFP

Medea Benjamin (C) of Code Pink gestures to two Capitol Police officers during an anti-war demonstration at the Hart Senate Office Building Wednesday on Capitol Hill in Washington, DC. The US Senate has passed a bill with a deadline to withdraw US troops from Iraq, but President George W Bush has threatened to veto the bill.

## Terror suspects plotted air attacks on Saudi oil plant

172 militants arrested

AFP, Riyadh

Saudi Arabia on Friday said it had arrested 172 terror suspects, along with weapons and wads of cash, with some of the militants plotting airborne attacks on oil facilities and army bases.

"Some individuals were training to fly to carry out terrorist attacks... Some of the cells arrested planned to target oil installations and refineries," interior ministry spokesman General Mansur al-Turki told AFP.

The al-Qaeda suspects rounded up by security forces, including Saudis and foreign residents, belonged to seven cells, the ministry said in a statement, which did not disclose the foreigners' nationalities.

Turki said their targets included "military bases in and outside" Saudi Arabia.

He said he did not know which military bases outside Saudi Arabia were among the targets, but added that there were no foreign military bases within the kingdom itself.

The US Air Force relocated its Gulf headquarters from Saudi Arabia to the tiny neighbouring emirate of Qatar in 2003, ending a 13-year presence in the oil-rich kingdom.

Pentagon officials said at the time that several hundred US military personnel stayed behind to perform tasks such as training.

The arrests reported on Friday were one of the largest swoops announced by Saudi, which has been battling suspected Al-Qaeda militants since they launched a wave of shootings and bombings, many targeting Westerners, in May 2003.

Turki told AFP the arrests were made over a lengthy period of time in several parts of the vast country.

The interior ministry statement, carried by official media, said one of the cells was made up of 61 mostly Saudi men, some of whom had gone abroad to train to fly aircraft with the intention of carrying out terrorist attacks.

In addition to planning suicide

bombings against oil and military targets, the suspects from the "deviant group" -- official terminology for presumed al-Qaeda militants -- also plotted to attack "public figures," it said.

Five of those detained were linked to a failed attempt to blow up an oil-processing plant, the world's largest, in Abqaiq in the oil-rich Eastern Province in February 2006, according to the statement.

Another cell sent recruits to training camps outside the country "to take part in regional conflicts" and then return to carry out attacks in Saudi Arabia, the statement said.

It was an apparent reference to Iraq, where Saudi nationals are among Sunni insurgents fighting US forces and their Iraqi government allies.

The statement said various weapons and communications equipment were seized in the swoop, in addition to money totalling more than 20 million riyals (5.3 million dollars).

## Rockets kill four in Pak tribal area

AFP, Miranshah

Four people were killed and three wounded early yesterday when rockets fired by suspected militants hit a house in a Pakistani tribal area bordering Afghanistan, officials said.

The incident happened at Saidgi village in the North Waziristan tribal district, around four kilometres (2.5 miles) from the frontier, a security official told AFP.

"Four people were killed and three others were injured when a rocket hit an outhouse for guests belonging to a tribesman called Habib Khan around 3:30 am," the official said on condition of anonymity.

Another four rockets caused damage to dozens of mud houses in the same village and destroyed an electricity transformer and severed power cables, he said.



PHOTO: AFP

Kosovo Serb refugees gather yesterday on the Kosovo border in the village of Jerinje, north of Kosovska Mitrovica, to demonstrate and tell the UN mission that they still want to return to their homes in the province. Nato allies called in Oslo for a rapid political resolution to Kosovo's future status amid concern that further delays could spark security problems, with Russia threatening to veto the process.

## Immigration-related cases clog US courts

AP, Washington

Immigration-related felony cases are swamping federal courts along the Southwest border, forcing judges to handle hundreds more cases than their peers elsewhere.

Judges in the five, mostly rural judicial districts on the border carry the heaviest felony caseloads in the nation. Each judge in New Mexico, which ranked first, handled an average of 397 felony cases last year, compared with the national average of 84.

Federal judges in those five districts -- Southern and Western Texas, New Mexico, Arizona and Southern California -- handled one-third of all the felonies prosecuted in the nation's 94 federal judicial districts in 2005, according to federal court statistics.

While Congress has increased the number of border patrol officers, the pace of the law enforcement has eclipsed the resources for the court system.

Judges say they are stretched to the limit with cases involving drug trafficking or illegal immigrants who have also committed serious crimes. Judges say they need help.

"The need is really dire. You cannot keep increasing the number of Border Patrol agents but not increasing the number of judges," said Chief Judge John M. Roll of the District of Arizona.

A bill by Sen Pete Domenici, R-New Mexico, and co-sponsored by Sen Jon Kyl, R-Arizona, and Texas Republican Sens John Cornyn, and Kay Bailey Hutchison, would add 10 permanent and temporary judges in Arizona, New Mexico, and Southern and Western Texas.

This proposal, and others like it, have gone nowhere in the past two years.

"I can't even tell you how much we need that," Roll said.

The entire federal court system is affected, from US marshals to magistrate judges. The bottleneck has even derailed enforcement efforts.

During a push to crack down on illegal immigration last fall, Customs and Border Protection floated a plan for New Mexico that would have suspended the practice of sending home hundreds of illegal immigrants caught near the border with Mexico. Instead, these people would be sent to court.

The idea, called "Operation Streamline," was to make it clear that people caught illegally in the US would be prosecuted.

## 19,000 still on death row: Amnesty

AFP, Rome

Judicial executions dropped sharply in 2006, but at least 19,000 people remained on death row at the end of the year, Amnesty International said in its annual report published yesterday.

A total of 1,591 people were executed, most of them in China, down from 2,148 in 2005, the London-based rights group said.

Amnesty unveiled the report in Italy, whose government is spearheading a campaign at the United Nations for a worldwide moratorium on the death penalty.

The vast majority of the world's executions occur in China, where 1,051 were carried out last year, according to official figures, "although the true figures were believed to be around 7,000 to 8,000," Amnesty said.

"The world is moving towards abolition of the death penalty," even if 25 countries carried out executions in 2006 compared with 22 in 2005.

After China, Iran was in second place with at least 177 executions, Pakistan with at least 82, Iraq and Sudan with at least 65 each and the United States with 53 in 12 states.

The United States is the only

country in the Americas that has carried out any executions since 2003, while many countries are abolishing the death penalty.

In Africa, four countries carried out executions in 2006, while in Europe, only Belarus still applies the death penalty, the report notes.



PHOTO: AFP

Pakistani activists of Jamiat Ulema-i-Islam (JUI) shout anti-Musharraf slogans during a demonstration in Islamabad yesterday. Hundred of JUI activists took to the streets to condemn a rocket attack at the residence of its chief and opposition leader Maulana Fazlur Rehman in the town of Dera Ismail Khan on April 20, which did not cause any casualties.