

Submission for Discussion at the Defence Policy Review Roundtable in Vancouver

As Canadian citizens, we applaud the government's conduct of this Defence Policy review. My colleagues in the Naval Association of Canada and myself stand ready to contribute to this public consultation and to support the government's recognition of the need for a Defence White Paper going forward. This submission is a collective effort to bring to the Minister's awareness the need for and the nature of a capable and effective navy. I hope that this will stimulate our discussion and provide a few thoughts to frame the roundtable conversation.

Generally, previous Canadian defence policies have espoused three recurring objectives. They are:

(1) Defend Canada; (2) Defend North America; and (3) Contribute to international peace and security.

Most previous policies have generally avoided the temptation to weight or prioritize these objectives. This is a good thing, in our opinion. Not weighting or prioritizing these objectives, which flows from the fact that it is extremely difficult to predict the future, allows for policy flexibility.

In addition to the need for alignment with foreign policy, a state's defence policy should be based on a rational assessment of the threat of military aggression, at home and abroad, both present and future. The most important threat to assess is the future one; unfortunately, it is also the most difficult to predict. An unclear or debatable assessment of future threats makes it difficult to garner pan-party support for difficult military equipment choices. The government will eventually need to espouse, publically or privately, its own assessment of future threats, and weave the implications into both defence and foreign policy. Several significant and negative security environment changes have occurred since the publication of CFDS in 2008. These need to be taken into account. For example, what are the new government's positions on: Russia's recent extra-territorial activities? Russia's future intentions? China's recent activities in the South China Sea? North Korea's long-range missile and nuclear weapons ambitions? Can we exclude the possibility that the Canadian Armed Forces (CAF) might one day be directed to respond to any of these, or other, issues?

Optimum military forces, which take years and in some instances decades to design and procure, can only be properly identified if the future threat has been correctly predicted. Given the difficulty of correctly predicting the future, acquiring balanced, general-purpose military capabilities, on land, in the air, and on and below the seas, seems prudent.

How much should a country spend on its defence? How much is enough? The largest single cost in defence is personnel, followed by equipment and real property related expenses. It is important to make the right personnel, equipment and real property choices. The only sure way to determine whether or not enough is being spent on defence is when the country's defence is actually put to the test. Spending on defence is like buying insurance: (1) you have to pay for it upfront; (2) you don't know when you will ever need to use its full capacity; and (3) you can't readily acquire some or more when a crisis suddenly emerges. As the government faces difficult financial choices, care will have to be taken not to predicate important, long-term defence policy and equipment decisions on current or short-term economic circumstances.

Oceans and navies have played key roles in the prosperity and security of most, if not all, states, especially littoral ones. Looking forward, the oceans will likely continue to play an important role in Canada's prosperity and security. Canada will continue to need a capable, effective, balanced and multi-purpose navy. A capable and effective navy cannot be easily and quickly created when a need arises. For it to be of use when needed, it must exist before difficult situations manifest themselves.

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The CAF and the RCN need to be able to exercise a reasonable degree of sea control on, above and below the ocean surface, wherever they are tasked to operate, be it in the open ocean (i.e. far from land) or in the littorals (i.e. near land), and be it near or far away from Canadian territory. Because of the costs involved, the CAF and the RCN cannot possess all elements of modern sea power. Ideally, the CAF and the RCN should be able to exercise sea control without the assistance of allies when operating in Canadian waters. Pragmatically, the CAF and the RCN draw upon the assistance of allies, as the situation dictates, when operating in far-away waters. Because it is difficult to predict future threats and situations, care must be exercised to acquire and maintain the right number, mix and quality of sea-going vessels and supporting services. Based on historical and anticipated defence budgets and the fact that the world has not necessarily become less tense since the fall of the Berlin Wall, the current number and mix of existing and proposed Canadian naval assets (coastal defence vessels, Arctic and offshore patrol ships, surface combatants, sub-surface combatants, underway replenishment ships, maritime helicopters and maritime patrol aircraft) represent a reasonably-balanced, multi-purpose, blue-water naval capability for Canada.

Fortunately, the government understands the importance of the Royal Canadian Navy (RCN) (and the Canadian Coast Guard) and the urgent need for fleet recapitalization. The Liberal election platform made welcomed and reassuring commitments about the navy; in particular, it committed to maintaining a blue-water naval fleet.

The Naval Association of Canada espouses 11 reasons why Canada needs a capable and effective Navy.

- (1) Canada's national interests of peace and security and economic prosperity are intertwined.
- (2) Canada possesses a vast, resource-rich ocean estate.
- (3) Canada is an increasingly global, sea trading nation.
- (4) Beyond its sovereign waters, Canada values, and is an ardent advocate of the rule of law at sea and of international peace and security.
- (5) There are threats to elements of Canada's national interests.
- (6) Future threats to our national interests are difficult to predict.
- (7) Canada must not rely exclusively on others to protect and further its national interests.
- (8) Canada's peace and security contributions to the United Nations, to the North Atlantic Treaty Organization and to other defence and security arrangements must be meaningful.
- (9) Future Canadian governments will likely one day need to send Canadian naval and maritime air forces into harm's way.
- (10) Without the establishment and continuous maintenance of ready-to-deploy, ready-to-act, capable and effective Canadian naval and maritime air forces which are purposely designed to operate against current and future threats in Canadian, international and far-away waters, the maritime-related elements of Canada's intertwined national interests of peace and security and economic prosperity will be at risk.
- (11) A capable and effective Navy is ultimately all about avoiding, preventing and deterring costly conflict and war.

Thank you for the opportunity to present this submission for the Roundtable discussion.

The foregoing is submitted by King Wan after consultation and with input from Daniel Sing, Director of Naval Affairs, and Jim Carruthers, President, of the Naval Association of Canada.